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NEW YORKER

APRIL 6, 2015

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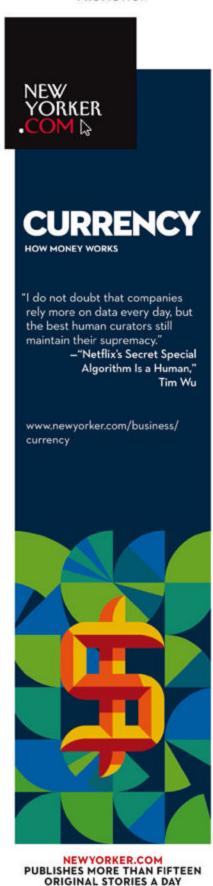
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PAGE-TURNER: An excerpt from Karl Ove Knausgaard's next book, with an introduction by Cressida Leyshon.

VIDEO: The latest episode of "Comma Queen," with Mary Norris. Plus, a video by Matt Black and Sky Dylan-Robbins about the forty-three missing students of Guerrero, Mexico.

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FICTION: The monthly fiction podcast, with *Deborah Treisman* and *Thomas McGuane*.

JOHN CASSIDY: Coverage of politics, economics, and more.

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THE MAIL

DRAMA AT THE MET

We were disheartened to read James Stewart's piece about the Metropolitan Opera, which presents a one-sided, negative view of what is, in fact, a thriving, vital organization that is essential to the cultural life of New York, and of the world ("A Fight at the Opera," March 23rd). The article emphasizes the challenging economics of grand opera and the difficulties of the Met's recent union negotiations without providing a balanced perspective on a company that is at the height of its artistic powers. Today, the Met is at the fore, making opera globally accessible through our game-changing, live, high-definition transmissions, which have been seen by millions of people, in seventy countries. We're certainly not suggesting that sustaining the Met is an easy task, but, under the watchful eye of the energetic Peter Gelb, his management team, and our dedicated board, it is a mission that is being accomplished. There is plenty of drama at the Met, both onstage and off, but not as Stewart told it. Kevin Kennedy, President

Revin Kennedy, President
Ann Ziff, Chairman
William C. Morris, Executive
Committee Chairman
Judith-Ann Corrente, Secretary
Metropolitan Opera
New York City

As the principal union representative of solo singers and choristers at the Met, I was disappointed by Stewart's story about Gelb's leadership and the battle over contracts. A chorister's day might start at 10 A.M. and end around midnight. During this summer's contract negotiations, much attention was focussed on principal artists, and in particular on the plight of the mezzosoprano Wendy White, who experienced a career-ending injury after falling from a platform. Eugene Keilin, an independent financial expert, advised us on what we had to do to "save the Met," and he recommended that the Met management save a dollar

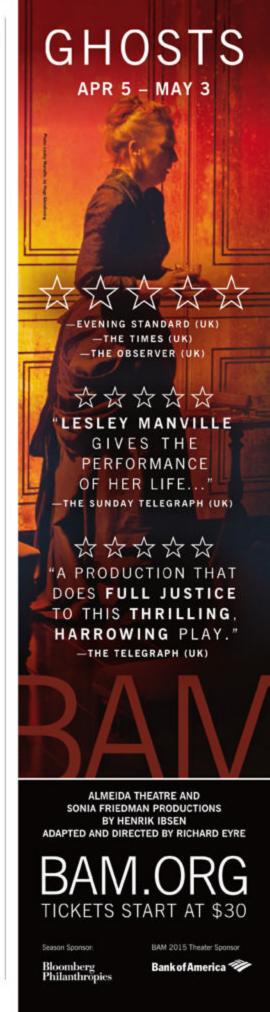
amount equal to the concessions offered by unions. The unions made concessions by taking pay cuts. The Met saved money not by limiting the number of expensive new productions but by firing and laying off twenty-two employees. The board has failed to rein in Gelb's out-of-control spending, and the relationship between Gelb and Met employees continues to be antagonistic. A union-driven efficiency committee, a partnership between the singers and the orchestra, keeps track of—and protests—the waste and extravagance that are still the order of the day at the Met. Alan Gordon

Executive Director, American Guild of Musical Artists, A.F.L.-C.I.O. New York City

As a longtime opera buff and a subscriber to the Met, I was stunned to learn the extent of the institution's financial problems. The Met's operating deficits are so immense that its assets must be pledged to fund them. Gelb's new "brilliant directors," as he has called them, have resulted in controversial productions, unhappy operagoers, and a decline in attendance. Opera is primarily a musical genre, and the art form as we know it today is the product of composers like Mozart, Verdi, and Wagner, who had keen theatrical sensibilities. Productions by directors who do not understand the scores, and who seek to reinterpret the story lines, may get good press coverage but do not age well. For a repertory company like the Met, the goal should be to put on productions that enhance the musical experience rather than detract from it. I hope that Gelb goes before the Chagall murals do.

Franklin Bloomer Riverside, Conn.

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter or return letters.



DIRECTED BY ALEX GIBNEY
FROM EXECUTIVE PRODUCER FRANK MARSHALL

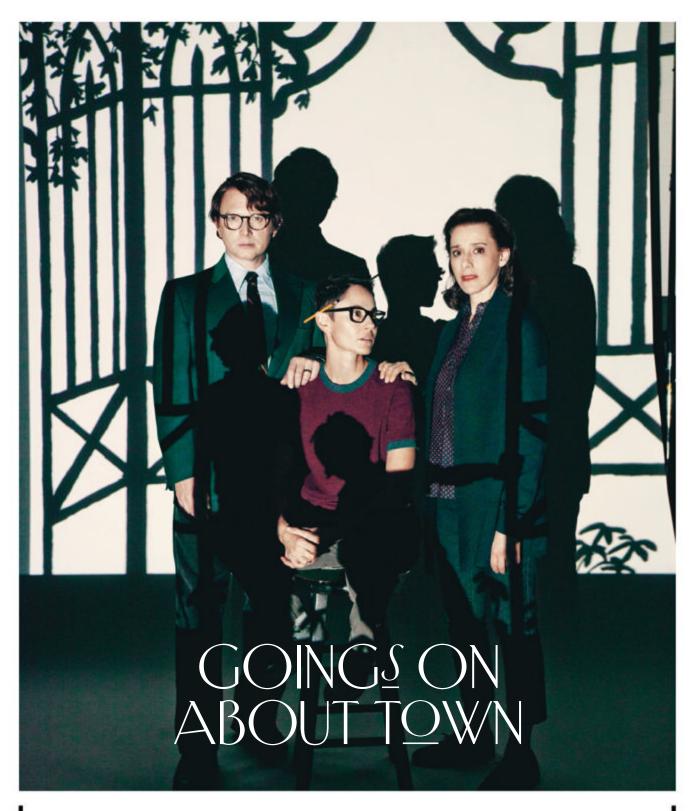
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THE CARTOONIST ALISON BECHDEL grew up in a funeral home in Pennsylvania, before launching the countercultural comic strip "Dykes to Watch Out For," in 1983. Her 2006 graphic memoir, "Fun Home," traced a tragic irony of her past: even as the adolescent Alison was coming into her lesbianism, her mercurial, possibly suicidal father was suppressing his gay identity. The playwright Lisa Kron and the composer Jeanine Tesori adapted the book into an openhearted musical, which ran at the Public last season and has just transferred to the Circle in the Square, under the direction of Sam Gold. Pictured above, Beth Malone plays the adult Alison, who watches the action unfold with a pad and pencil; Michael Cerveris and Judy Kuhn play her anguished parents.

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THE VISIT

Lyceum

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Airline Highway

Manhattan Theatre Club presents a play by Lisa D'Amour, directed by Joe Mantello, in which a group of oddballs gather in a motel parking lot to celebrate the life of a burlesque performer. In previews. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

Ghosts

Almeida Theatre's production of the Henrik Ibsen play, adapted and directed by Richard Eyre. Lesley Manville stars, as a woman anguished by the moral deceptions of her late husband. Previews begin April 5. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

Grounded

Anne Hathaway stars in a play by George Brant, about a fighter pilot reassigned to flying drones. Julie Taymor directs. Previews begin April 7. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

lowa

Ken Rus Schmoll directs the world première of a new musical play by Jenny Schwartz, with music by Todd Almond and lyrics by Schwartz and Almond, in which a girl must move to the Midwest after her mother falls in love with someone on Facebook. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

Living on Love

Renée Fleming, Anna Chlumsky, Jerry O'Connell, and Douglas Sills star in Joe DiPietro's comedy, in which a famous opera singer hires a handsome young man to write her autobiography. Kathleen Marshall directs. In previews. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

Skylight

Carey Mulligan and Bill Nighy reprise their roles in the play by David Hare, after a run in London last year. Stephen Daldry directs the drama, in which a young teacher is visited by her former lover, a restaurateur whose wife has just died. In previews. Opens April 2. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Wolf Hall: Parts One & Two

The Royal Shakespeare Company's productions of Hilary Mantel's books "Wolf Hall" and "Bring Up the Bodies" come to Broadway. In previews. (Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

The Heidi Chronicles

Wendy Wasserstein's 1988 play, which won the Pulitzer Prize, tells the story of an art historian, Heidi Holland (Elisabeth Moss), who is in love with two essentially unavailable men: a gay doctor named Peter Patrone

(Bryce Pinkham) and a wheeler-dealer called Scoop Rosenbaum (Jason Biggs). Heidi doesn't complain about the unsatisfying nature of either relationship; together, the men form a kind of whole. Still, her greatest affection is reserved for other independent women, alive or dead. Heidi, who attended a women's college in the sixties, took the era's consciousness-raising to heart. But how does that ideology fit in with the eighties women who surround her now, chasing celebrity in their power suits? Wasserstein wanted a hit with "Heidi," and she got it, mostly by making the humor too broad. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/30/15.) (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

I'm Looking for Helen Twelvetrees

In the early days of the talkies, Helen Twelvetrees appeared in pictures for Fox and RKO, before subsiding into obscurity, then overdosing on sedatives. The playwright and actor David Greenspan effects a resurrection. Inspired by a wistful publicity still and a report that Helen played Blanche DuBois in summer stock, he imagines a young man (Greenspan) hopping a Greyhound bus in search of the faded star (Brooke Bloom). The script also limns Helen's relationships with her husbands (Keith Nobbs plays the first; Greenspan the others) and some of Greenspan's own story. A sequentially scrambled bioplay becomes a meditation on the past-evanescent, irrecoverable. At times, Greenspan seems besotted with his own gifts, but those gifts are ample, and the director Leigh Silverman uses them tenderly and astutely. Perhaps the play itself seems too slight, too ephemeral, but, as Helen says, "We're all forgotten—soon enough." (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. Through April 4.)

Josephine and I

The British actress and writer Cush Jumbo performs her passionate and essayistic version of the life and times of Josephine Baker, in an intermissionless monologue directed, with care, by Phyllida Lloyd. Sometimes the autobiographical elements of the show are amusing: Jumbo juxtaposes her frantic worry with Baker's frantic success. She is very much enamored of Baker the performance artist, a creature who became an amalgamation of many different ways of being. It's unfortunate that, toward the end of the show, Jumbo makes a plea for audience sympathy that feels wrong, like stock melodrama. There's no need: she has us the minute we see those wide-set eyes and those long legs, running hither and yon, beating out time on a small stage that's made infinite by her charm and exertions. (3/30/15) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Through April 5.)

On the Twentieth Century

Kristin Chenoweth has an energy level that goes beyond anything you find in nature, and what she does with it in the Roundabout's production, directed by Scott Ellis, is far more compelling than the musical itself. The show has a book and lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green and a score by Cy Coleman. Given the talents involved, it's odd how little of the music stays with you, and how little inspiration any of it provides. Chenoweth, as a self-absorbed star who tries her best to stay that way, does all the stuff you'd expect her to do-she sings, she mugs, she climbs over furniture and climbs over men who tower above her. But she can't bring to life a musical whose lack of relevance ends up being its prime source of interest and "entertainment." (3/30/15) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

Placebo

In Melissa James Gibson's new play, the authoritative Carrie Coon plays a scientist named Louise. Louise's mother is dying, and Louise is at work on a drug that's meant to stimulate female sexual arousal—a necessary part of life, since life begins in women. Living unhappily in what looks like student housing with her boyfriend, Jonathan (William Jackson Harper), who's studying to be a classicist and can't give up smoking-it's one of the things they talk about way too much—Louise finds herself drifting, emotionally, toward another man, Tom (the gifted Alex Hurt), who pays attention to her in ways that Jonathan cannot. Under the direction of Daniel Aukin, the actors are better than the script, and what's more painful than watching actors try to make up for a playwright's failings? (3/30/15) (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through April 5.)

Small Mouth Sounds

In Bess Wohl's nearly noiseless comedy, six urbanites gather upstate for a silent retreat, keeping their lips zipped and their minds quiet with mixed success. Laura Jellinek's set is a strip of blond floor bisecting the audience, on which the actors (Jessica Almasy, Marcia DeBonis, Brad Heberlee, Sakina Jaffrey, Erik Lochtefeld, and Babak Tafti) indulge in plenty of physical comedy and clever pantomime. Still, there's a visible vein of melancholy lying just below the surface jokes, underneath the hiking pants. Poignant and droll, this is a play about the difficulty of communication, verbal or otherwise, and, like Wohl's earlier works ("American Hero," "Pretty Filthy"), the unlikeliness of ever actually changing your life. Under Rachel Chavkin's direction, the actors offer lucid, generous performances, as does Jojo Gonzalez, as the disembodied voice of the flu-stricken Zen master. (Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 212-352-3101.)



STILL PSYCHO

Fifty years after they released their début album, the Sonics are on their first major U.S. tour.

GARAGE ROCK, THE GENRE THAT flourished in the nineteen-sixties, doesn't exactly demand innovation. Songs should be crunchy and upbeat, and if they focus on girls, or cars, or girls in cars, they'll pretty much do the trick. Early on, the Sonics intuitively understood this—but they also played harder, faster, and with more grim aggression than anyone in Tacoma, Washington, had ever thought to play. Morbid hits—now cult favorites—like "Psycho" and "The Witch" sounded angrier and more abrasive than any form of rock and roll that had come before. On "Strychnine," the vocalist Jerry Roslie menacingly intones, "Some folks like water, some folks like wine / But I like the taste of straight strychnine."

At the time, Tacoma was the working-class Liverpool to Seattle's swingin' London. "My dad ran a crane on the waterfront," the saxophonist Rob Lind said recently. "There were great musicians in Seattle, but the music was jazzy and swingy. We were blue-collar guys—we wanted to rock." Their formula—straight, pounding beats, bellowing or screeched vocals, pre-stomp-box distortion achieved by maxing out their amps' volume—presaged the volatile energy of punk rock. It also built them a fan base in the Northwest "teen club" scene, where bored youth drank in the parking lots of halls with names like the Red Carpet and the Lake Hills roller rink. But a lack of national distribution prevented them from reaching a wider audience. The Sonics never toured extensively, and hit their peak opening for groups like the Beach Boys, Jan and Dean, and the Kinks in Seattle. Roslie left, Lind was drafted into Vietnam in 1967, and the band evaporated, its five members spending the next forty years building families and careers as car salesmen, teachers, and, in Lind's case, an airline pilot.

But the Sonics made a deep impression. A snaky cover of "Strychnine" found its way onto the Cramps' début album, from 1980. In 1994, Kurt Cobain said that Bob Bennett's machine-gun



drumming was "the most amazing drum sound I've ever heard." Their songs have been recorded by Bruce Springsteen, the Fall, and the Flaming Lips, and the Ramones and the White Stripes have cited them as an influence. During the garagerock revival of the early aughts, the Sonics were rediscovered by a new group of listeners, and they reunited in 2007.

This week, the band releases "This Is the Sonics," its first album of new material in nearly half a century, one of the longest intervals between recordings in rock history. The new work has the same primal intensity of its previous records, thanks in no small part to the producer Jim Diamond, who has worked with the White Stripes, the Mooney Suzuki, and a slew of other contemporary acts who owe a debt to the Sonics. Diamond recorded the band in mono, to capture the spirit of the sixties output.

Lind quit his day job, and he and the Sonics have embarked on a tour of the U.S., with a stop at Irving Plaza on April 8. With the band members in their seventies, will the live show still pack a punch? Lind chuckled. "It's the most fun I can have without getting in trouble with the cops."

—Benjamin Shapiro



CULTURAL COMMENT

DEBATES ABOUT CULTURE, THE ARTS, AND IDEAS.

"If no longer vital to a woman's status as a human being, marriage is still understood as her crowning success, the event without which her life won't be truly complete."

-"Marriage Is an Abduction," Elif Batuman

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ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

The Decemberists

It's been four years since the release of the Portland, Oregon, band's last album, "The King Is Dead," an outstanding contribution to the American folk-rock tradition. In the intervening years, the lead singer and songwriter, Colin Meloy, successfully exercised his epic-narrative muscles by collaborating with his wife, the illustrator Carson Ellis, on the best-selling "Wildwood" trilogy of kids' books. On the band's new record, "What a Terrible World, What a Beautiful World," Meloy reaffirms his mastery of concise pop expression. Free-form d.j.s should be scrambling to put the album's first single, "Make You Better," in a set with a couple of other pretty good rock songs, the Kinks' "Better Things" and the Beatles' "Getting Better." (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 212-465-6500. April 6.)

The Kennedys

Pete and Maura Kennedy spent several years playing in Nanci Griffith's band before releasing a sparkling début, "River of Fallen Stars," in 1995. They've since put out more than a dozen records, and they've been married for twenty years. Now the Kennedys are celebrating the release of their latest album, "West," an inspired collection of sixties-flecked folk rock full of broad vistas. They each have solo projects coming up, too. Maura's "Villanelle," a collaboration with the poet B. D. Love, is set to come out at the end of April, and Pete's "Heart of Gotham," a song cycle about their home town, is due later this year. (Rockwood Music Hall, 196 Allen St. 212-477-4155. April 3.)

London Souls

Shortly after the band recorded its second album, "Here Come the Girls," in 2012, its guitarist and lead songwriter, Tash Neal, was the victim of a horrendous hit-and-run accident, when the cab he was in was struck by a drag-racing BMW near the corner of Bleecker and Broadway. His survival, much less his music career, hung in the balance. As anyone who attended the group's brief showcase performance at Rockwood Music Hall in February can attest, Neal has made a terrific recovery. This two-man band-Chris St. Hilaire is the drummer and second singer-gives you everything you could ask of a rock group: great songs, powerful, dynamic playing and singing, and a true sense of joy and brotherhood. Their April 7 gig at the Bowery Ballroom is a homecoming celebration for the delayed release of the new record. (6 Delancey St. 212-533-2111.)

Twin Shadow

George Lewis, Jr., who records and performs under this name, was born in the Dominican Republic, raised in Florida, and is now based in L.A., after spending time in Brooklyn. His musical history is similarly spread out; he's worked as a composer for a touring dance company and fronted a punk band, Mad Man Films. But under his current moniker, he's found his calling as an electro-pop artist with a knack for big hooks, high drama, and an eighties New Wave style. On his third LP and first major-label release, "Eclipse," the singer takes his performances to the next level, delivering seismic anthems—it will be a wonder if a venue the size of the Music Hall of Williamsburg

can contain them. (66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. 718-486-5400. March 31-April 1.)

"Jim White vs. the Packway Handle Band"

This project is a fruitful collaboration between White—a mystical, expressive singer-songwriter whose experiences include stints in the worlds of theology, boxing, fashion, and N.Y.C. cabdriving—and the Packway Handle Band, a modern bluegrass quintet out of Athens, Georgia. The Packways asked White to produce a record, and he was so taken with their approach that he decided to join their band. As it happened, White had an old collection of bluegrass tunes that he wanted to try out, and the group had some originals of their own that fit White's voice. So they got together for a fine new album, "Take It Like a Man," and a tour. (Le Poisson Rouge, 158 Bleecker St. 212-505-3474. April 2.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Tom Harrell

A player obviously drawn to challenges, the formidable post-bop trumpeter Harrell invites **Ambrose Akinmusire**, an abundantly gifted fellow-trumpeter half his age, to join the leader as his second horn. Harrell has also shaken things up in his quintet's rhythm section by replacing the customary pianist with the guitarist **Charles Altura**. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. March 31-April 5.)

Sheila Jordan with the Steve Kuhn Trio

An acolyte and friend of Charlie Parker, the singer Jordan absorbed bebop from the source, but she's also a committed modernist whose style has evolved with the ensuing decades. One of the key collaborators who assisted Jordan in her artistic growth is the equally inventive pianist Kuhn, who leads the trio supporting her at Birdland this week. (315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. March 31-April 4.)

Bucky Pizzarelli / Ed Laub

The grace, profundity, and wit that attend the playing of the eighty-nine-year-old guitarist Pizzarelli are an outgrowth of the literally thousands of gigs and recording sessions he's participated in. This acknowledged dean of mainstream jazz has developed a fine rapport with the guitarist Laub, a familiar duet partner. Between the two of them, they have fourteen strings for making exquisite music, as each plays an atypical seven-string guitar. (Jazz at Kitano, 66 Park Ave., at 38th St. 212-885-7119. April 4.)

Sara Serpa

This singer doesn't have an overpowering voice, but her subtlety and sureness command serious attention. Her City Fragments ensemble, at the Cornelia Street Café on April 4, unites her with two other singers, Sofia Rei and Aubrey Johnson, who are backed by a notable instrumental trio of the guitarist André Matos, the bassist Thomas Morgan, and the drummer Tyshawn Sorey. (29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319.)

Randy Weston

The Brooklyn-born pianist, composer, and bandleader, who celebrates his eighty-ninth birthday this month, has had African culture on his mind throughout his lengthy career, directly referencing the primal roots music of jazz in his compositions and ambitious large-scale projects. His long-standing African Rhythms band includes the frenetic bassist Alex Blake, the saxophonist T. K. Blue, and the marvellously adaptable drummer Lewis Nash. (Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. April 2-5.)



OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

Like some of his later masterworks, Verdi's early-period melodrama "Ernani" relies upon farfetched plot twists to test the characters' mettle and whip up a terrific sense of urgency in the music. Fortunately, the company's music director, James Levine, knows how to capitalize on the abundance of propulsive rhythms and soaring melodies to unleash the brash vitality of the young Verdi's music. Singing the role of Elvira with a big, clear voice, the soprano Angela Meade anchors a cast that includes Francesco Meli (a thrillingly ardent Ernani), Dmitry Belosselskiy (a grave, forbidding Silva), and the septuagenarian tenor superstar Plácido Domingo, whose typically lustrous timbre fails to register in the baritone role of Don Carlo. (April 4 at 1.) • Also playing: Originally seen in 2007, this revival of Mary Zimmerman's Victorian-era production of "Lucia di Lammermoor" features Albina Shagimuratova in the title role, with the honey-voiced tenor Joseph Calleja, as her beloved, and Luca Salsi, as her disapproving brother; Maurizio Benini conducts. (April 1 and April 7 at 7:30 and April 4 at 8.) • Verdi's "Don Carlo," arguably the grandest of his grand operas, portrays the palace intrigue in King Philip II's court during the Spanish Inquisition. With half a dozen finely drawn characters, a few love triangles, and one mildly incestuous love affair that threatens the welfare of at least three nations, there is enough drama-and magnificent music-for two Verdi operas. The Met's cast includes Yonghoon Lee, Barbara Frittoli, Ekaterina Gubanova, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, Ferruccio Furlanetto (a Philip II of legendary stature), and James Morris; Yannick Nézet-Séguin. (April 2 and April 6 at 7.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

RECITALS

Murray Perahia

After more than forty years before the public, this pianist's playing may not offer fireworks, but it reveals a burnished authority and a probing mind. His program at Carnegie Hall gently links the German and French schools: there are not only sonatas by Haydn and Beethoven (in E-Flat Major, "Les Adieux") and Bach's French Suite No. 6 in E Major but also works by two Parisian composers who revered them, Franck (the stately Prelude, Chorale, and Fugue) and Chopin (the dazzling Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor). (212-247-7800. April 1 at 8.)

Attacca Quartet: "Seven Words"

The Metropolitan Museum's string quartet-inresidence completes a stimulating season with one of the grandest of Christian sacred works, Haydn's "Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross." The listening experience will be enhanced by "Seven Words," a simultaneous video presentation by Ofri Cnaani arranged in collaboration with the ensemble's musicians. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. April 2 at 7.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center: "New Music in the Kaplan Penthouse"

The latest concert in an important and consistently engaging series in the Society's schedule brings a collection of sterling young performers (including the pianist Gilles Vonsattel and the violinist James Ehnes) together with works by established mid-career composers such as Derek Bermel (the New York première of "Death with Interruptions," a piano trio), Aaron Jay Kernis (a recent piece, "Two Movements with Bells"), Jukka Tiensuu, and Jörg Widmann. In addition, there's music by a vaunted modernist, the late Leon Kirchner (the Piano Trio No. 1). (Rose Bldg., Lincoln Center. 212-875-5788. April 2 at 7:30.)

Joy in Singing: Stephen Paulus Memorial Concert

Paulus, who died last fall, from complications of a stroke, spent more than three decades producing operatic, orchestral, and vocal music of impeccable technique and well-honed audience appeal. He was also a staunch advocate for contemporary composers, a number of whom will certainly show up to pay tribute to him in a concert that includes the song cycles "A Heartland Portrait" (with poems by Ted Kooser) and "Artsongs" (settings of poems about art by Rilke, Wilbur, O'Hara, and others). (Bruno Walter Auditorium,

Lincoln Center. April 6 at 6. For information about free tickets, see lincolncenter.org.)

Cutting Edge Concerts: American Modern Ensemble

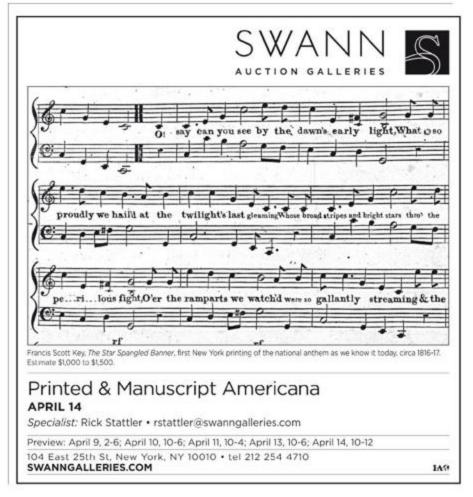
The enduring new-music series, curated every spring by the composer-conductor Victoria Bond, has moved from Symphony Space to the stylish downtown music club SubCulture. The first concert is offered by Robert Paterson's outstanding contemporary group, which will mark its tenth anniversary by performing the New York premières of pieces by Nicolas Scherzinger and Mark Winges, along with music by Bond and Paterson (the world première of "Shards"). (45 Bleecker St. subculturenewyork. com. April 6 at 8.)

Raphaël Sévère

The young clarinettist, winner of the First Prize in the prestigious Young Concert Artists International Auditions, takes the stage at Merkin Concert Hall to perform sonatas by Brahms and Poulenc as well as Pierre Boulez's "Domaines" and Stravinsky's Suite from "The Soldier's Tale" (with the pianist Paul Montag and the violinist Paul Huang). (129 W. 67th St. 212-307-6656. April 7 at 7:30.)

"Before Bach": L'Arpeggiata

Christina Pluhar's acclaimed period ensemble kicks off Carnegie Hall's extensive series of spring concerts devoted to the music of the late Renaissance and early Baroque eras. Her programs celebrate two geniuses of florid music for voices and instruments: Francesco Cavalli, on the first night, and Henry Purcell, on the second. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. April 7-8 at 7:30.)







The actor Lee Kang-Sheng and a watermelon both play major roles in "Vive l'Amour."

SEX AND THE CITY

The director Tsai Ming-Liang eroticizes Asian cinema.

THE SURGE IN ARTISTIC FILMMAKING from East Asia in the nineteen-eighties and nineties yielded one director of an uncompromisingly daring aestheticism, Tsai Ming-Liang, who was born in Malaysia but has long been based in Taiwan. The upcoming retrospective of his work at the Museum of the Moving Image (April 10–26) is a long-needed overview of his vast and distinctive achievements.

The opening-night offering, "Vive l'Amour," from 1994, is a wryly comic drama about a romantic triangle as well as the story of a luxurious and empty Taipei apartment where a suicidal salesman of cremation urns (Lee Kang-Sheng) lives as a squatter. When a real-estate agent (Yang Kuei-Mei) brings her lover (Chen Chao-Jung), a street vender, there, Tsai stages the trio's erotic comings and goings with an incremental screwball precision, as if Jacques Tati had given free rein to his sexual fantasies. But the filmmaker grounds the irony in quietly flamboyant melodramatic moods, as in a scene where the agent waits alone in bed with an operatic pout that calls to mind grand Technicolor tearjerkers. The center of Tsai's singular universe is the slight, angular, puckish Lee, who stars in all of Tsai's features and lends them the soulful yearnings of silent-comedy luminaries as well as an uninhibited carnality, both homosexual and heterosexual.

Setting much of the taciturn, delicately choreographed action amid the city's bustle, the director fuses a rigorously stylized vision with incisive documentary observation; Tsai is one of the great sardonic observers of urban spaces, with a keen eye for both the alien chill of gleaming towers and the poetic allure of decrepitude. In "Vive l'Amour,"Tsai displays fetishes and fascinations that, since then, he has elevated into a personal cinematic mythology: real-estate machinations and leaky roofs, dripping water and lost keys, takeout food and lonely teardrops, melons (which he treats as erotic objects) and bathrooms (ditto). His vision of pop culture is radically sexualized; he treats movie theatres as both artistic havens and pickup joints, as in "Goodbye, Dragon Inn" (screening April 26), and, in "The Wayward Cloud" (April 12), he works popular songs into comical, and sometimes pornographic, production numbers.

Over the course of his career, Tsai, who has said that his 2014 feature, "Stray Dogs," may be his last, has developed a subtly comprehensive view of modern life; he reveals economic inequity and rotting infrastructure behind luxurious façades, and shows physical needs and emotional desires surging through the city's order and fracturing it, illuminating it, humanizing it.

—Richard Brody

Chappie

Neill Blomkamp's new film returns him to Johannesburg, where his first-and his most incisive-feature, "District 9," took place. The power of that movie derived, in part, from the sardonic glance that it cast on racial divisions, but those are barely touched upon here; if he holds anything up to scrutiny now (and you can't always tell, amid the sound and fury), it is the unregulated craze for law and order. Gun-toting police drones are already on the streets, but a young computer expert (Dev Patel) seeks something more refined: a robot that can think and feel for itself. The result is Chappie (voiced by Sharlto Copley), who is no sooner created than he is hijacked by hoodlums and taught to dress, talk, and fight like a gang member. But will he obey only those instructions, or somehow become a wiser and more delicate droid? And does the world really need artificially intelligent poets, anyway? These questions are thrown away as the movie accelerates into brashness, urged on by a phalanx of poor performances-the prime offenders being Ninja and Yo-Landi Visser, from the South African rap-rave outfit Die Antwoord. Hugh Jackman, dressed as a big-game hunter in shorts and boots, and armed with a haircut that could stop a rhino, plays the evil maker of another robot—a tank-style destroyer, clearly borrowed from the set of "RoboCop," The principal charm of the film arises from Chappie's ears, which prick up and droop like those of a titanium rabbit.—Anthony Lane (In wide release.)

Cinderella

The true believer, not the smart-ass, is the target of this new live-action telling of the fairy tale. The writer, Chris Weitz, and the director, Kenneth Branagh, allow no knowing winks to obscure our view of the story: Cinderella (Lily James) suffers first the death of her mother (Hayley Atwell) and then the marriage of her doting father (Ben Chaplin) to Lady Tremaine (Cate Blanchett), whose dreadful daughters (Holliday Grainger and Sophie McShera) come as part of the package. We are granted, as required, a fairy godmother (Helena Bonham Carter), a golden coach sprung from a pumpkin, a ball, a slipper, and a prince (Richard Madden). The whole movie, despite its chest of digital tricks, is almost heroically old-fashioned; the effect is to confirm the irrepressible force of the Cinderella myth and the archetypes that it enfolds. Assistance is given, in rapturous style, by Sandy Powell's costumes and by the production design of Dante Ferretti. But did nobody at Disney think of asking another Italian master, Ennio Morricone, to bestow his gifts? The score, by Patrick Doyle, is efficiently grand, but a myth as memorable as this demands a theme to match.—A.L. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/16/15.) (In wide release.)

The Devil Is a Woman

For his last film with Marlene Dietrich, from 1935, the director Josef von Sternberg-working as his own cinematographer—streaked and slashed the screen with shadows and highlights, clotted it with lace and foliage, to match the serpentine extravagance of his wily heroine's schemes. The surprise is in the politics: as the Spanish Civil War was heating up, von Sternberg set the action in turn-of-the-century Spain, where Antonio (Cesar Romero), a dashing young revolutionary, returns from Parisian exile amid the turmoil of carnival week and encounters the bewitching songstress Concha Perez (Dietrich). Antonio's friend Don Pasqual (Lionel Atwill), one of her victims, tries his best to warn him, telling his own tale of woe (seen in extended flashbacks), but the romantic adventurer is not to be deterred, even at the risk of his mission and his life. Despite his evident sympathies for the daring freethinker Antonio, von Sternberg finds a lurid erotic charge in the cruelty and the constraints of church-bound despotism and a heightened thrill in a femme fatale who may prove truly fatal. -Richard Brody (MOMA; April 1-5.)

Imitation of Life

For his last Hollywood film, released in 1959, the German director Douglas Sirk unleashed a melodramatic torrent of rage at the corrupt core of American life-the unholy trinity of racism, commercialism, and puritanism. The story starts in 1948, when two widowed mothers of young daughters meet at Coney Island: Lora Meredith (Lana Turner), an aspiring actress, who is white, and Annie Johnson (Juanita Moore), a homeless and unemployed woman, who is black. The Johnsons move in with the Merediths; Annie keeps house while Lora auditions. A decade later, Lora is the toast of Broadway, and Annie (who still calls her Miss Lora) continues to maintain the house. Meanwhile, Lora endures troubled relationships with a playwright (Dan O'Herlihy), an adman (John Gavin), and her daughter (Sandra Dee); and Annie's light-skinned, teen-age daughter, Sarah Jane (Susan Kohner), is working as a bump-and-grind showgirl and passing as white, even as whites pass as happy and Annie exhausts herself mastering her anger and maintaining her self-control. For Sirk, the grand finale is a funeral for the prevailing order, a trumpet blast against social façades and walls of silence. The price of success, in his view, may be the death of the soul, but its wages afford retirement, withdrawal, and contemplation—and, upon completing the film, that's what Sirk did.—R.B. (Film Forum; April 3-9.)

Insurgent

In the second film in the "Divergent" trilogy (based on the novels by

Veronica Roth), it takes a month of exposition for the action to kick in, but when it does it offers a special-effects spectacle that's something to see. It's set in a future American dystopia that's divided into personality-based "factions" oppressed by a government headed by the tyrannical Jeanine (Kate Winslet). Tris (Shailene Woodley) is among the "divergent"—those with too much moxie for any one slot, who are considered enemies of the state. Facing arrest, Tris, her boyfriend, Four (Theo James), and her brother, Caleb (Ansel Elgort), escape to urban ruins, where Jeanine catches her and subjects her to a series of "sims"—death-defying A.I. adventures that test character along with survival skills, in order to open a mystic box of secrets that will save Jeanine's decadent and shaky regime. These imaginary adventures—which can truly get Tris killed—are the core of the film, and they're wild rides, starting with the snakelike cables that connect and suspend Tris. Many of her acrobatic ordeals take place high above the ravaged skyline, and they're not for acrophobes; the dissolution of her simulated victims into digital detritus is among the film's more memorable gimmicks. There's little substance and little depth, but Woodley, with her preternatural poise, offers a worthy simulation of drama. Directed by Robert Schwentke; co-starring Miles Teller.-R.B. (In wide release.)

It Follows

The setting of David Robert Mitchell's film is Detroit, and he makes full use of its contrasts: placid suburban neighborhoods give way to the untenanted and the derelict. When the surface of life is so easily cracked, it comes as no surprise that horror, like disease, can worm its way in. So it is that a teen-age girl named Jay (Maika Monroe) inherits a nameless plague. After sex in a car, she finds herself stalked by one remorseless figure after another; she alone can see them, but they will wipe her out unless she can pass the curse on to somebody else, by carnal means. How you interpret this doomy state of affairs will depend on your response to Mitchell's narrative rhythms; in between the frights that iump out at irregular intervals, he lets the action slide into anomie, as the heroine and her friends, one of whom keeps quoting Dostoyevsky, drift through their bored and all but adultless days. Violent extinction, in such a light, becomes just one of those things. With Keir Gilchrist, as a fine-boned boy who would die for the love of Jay. -A.L. (3/16/15) (In limited release.)

The Argentine director Lisandro Alonso refracts John Ford's classic Western "The Searchers" into a modernist blend of myth, politics,

OPENING 5 TO 7

Victor Levin directed this romantic comedy, about a young writer (Anton Yelchin) who has an affair with a diplomat's wife (Bérénice Marlohe). Co-starring Olivia Thirlby and Frank Langella. Opening April 3. (In limited release.)

A new installment in the "Fast and Furious" series, about a battling crew of street racers, starring Paul Walker (in his last film appearance), Vin Diesel, Dwayne Johnson, Michelle Rodriguez, and Jason Statham. Directed by James Wan. Opening April 3. (In wide release.)

THAT GUY DICK MILLER

A documentary about the character actor, directed by Elijah Drenner. Opening April 3. (Anthology Film Archives.)

LAMBERT & STAMP

A documentary, directed by James D. Cooper, about two underground filmmakers who discovered and managed the Who. Opening April 3. (In limited

NED RIFLE

Hal Hartley directed this drama, about a young man (Liam Aiken) who plans to kill his father. Co-starring Parker Posey. Opening April 1. (IFC Center and video on demand.)

WOMAN IN GOLD

A drama, based on the true story of Maria Altmann, a Jewish woman who fled Nazi-occupied Austria and later sued to recover her family's art works. Directed by Simon Curtis; starring Helen Mirren. Opening April 1. (In wide release.)

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Titles in bold are reviewed.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

The films of Dick Miller. April 4 at 5: "Sorority Girl" (1957, Roger Corman). • April 4 at 9:15: "Gremlins" (1984, Joe Dante), with a cast



MOVIE OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of Eliza Hittman's "It Felt Like Love," from 2013, in our digital edition and online.

reunion including Miller, Zach Galligan, and Phoebe Cates. • April 5 at 9:15: "Gremlins 2: The New Batch" (1990, Dante). • April 6 at 9: "Hollywood Boulevard" (1976, Dante and Allan Arkush).

BAM CINÉMATEK

"Overdue: James B. Harris." April 1 at 7:30: "Some Call It Loving" (1973). • April 2 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Fast-Walking" (1982). • April 3 at 2, 4:30, and 9:30: "The Bedford Incident" (1965). • April 4 at 2 and 6:30: "Cop" (1988). • April 5 at 2, 7:15, and 9:15 and April 6 at 4:30 and 9:30: "The Killing" (1956, Stanley Kubrick). • April 5 at 4: "Lolita" (1962, Kubrick). • April 6 at 7: "Telefon" (1977, Don Siegel). • "Afrofuturism on Film." April 3 at 7: "Beat This!: A Hip Hop History" (1984. Dick Fontaine).

FILM FORUM

In revival. April 3-9 (call for showtimes): "Imitation of

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN

The films of Walerian Borowczyk. April 2 at 2:45 and 7: "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Miss Osbourne" (1981). • April 3 at 5 and 9:15: "The Beast" (1975). • April 4 at 9:30: "The Streetwalker" (1976), introduced by the cinematographer Sean Price Williams. • April 5 at 4:30 and 9:30: "Immoral Tales" (1974), introduced by Williams

JAPAN SOCIETY

"The Most Beautiful." April 3 at 7: "No Regrets for Our Youth" (1946, Akira Kurosawa). • April 4 at 4: "Late Spring." • April 4 at 7: "House of Bamboo" (1955, Samuel Fuller).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The films of Joel McCrea. April 1-3 at 1:30: "The More the Merrier" (1942, George Stevens). • In revival. April 1-5 (call for showtimes): "The Devil Is a Woman." • "Recent Acquisitions." April 2 at 4:30: "A Film Unfinished" (2010, Yael Hersonski). • April 4 at 1:30: "Beyond the Beyond" (2008, Lourdes Portillo). • April 6 at 4:30: "Pegasus" (2010, Mohamed Mouftakir).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

"Required Viewing: 'Mad Men''s Movie Influences.' April 4-5 at 4: "Patterns" (1956, Fielder Cook). • April 4-5 at 7: "Dear Heart" (1964, Delbert Mann).

and existential adventure. Viggo Mortensen stars as Gunnar Dinesen, a Danish officer who works with Argentine forces in Patagonia, in a war against the indigenous people-and is accompanied by his fourteen-year-old daughter, Ingeborg (Viilbjørk Malling Agger). When Ingeborg runs off with an Argentinean soldier, Dinesen gets on his horse and heads off alone to find her. Alonso frames the action in long takes that reveal the landscape's range of colors and textures. He captures crucial details at great distances, as if infinitesimally, forcing the viewer to share Dinesen's concentrated, agitated gaze. As the story veers into mythopoetic wonders, some of its tropes get heavy-handed, but Alonso's leaps of time, his view of the wiles of combat and the rigors of survival, and his reflection of present-day splendors in past plunder lend the visually sumptuous experience a haunting depth. In Spanish and Danish.—R.B. (In limited release.)

Late Spring

Noriko (Setsuko Hara), a widowed professor's grown daughter, loves the scholarly Hattori (Jun Usami), who is already engaged. Her father (Chishu Ryu) and her meddling aunt (Haruko Sugimura) arrange a suitable but loveless match for her, which she would refuse, if only she could find a socially acceptable excuse. In Yasujiro Ozu's 1949 film, rigid formality leaves much unsaid, but Ozu reveals the hidden depths of ordinary life with a quiet astonishment and observes his characters with an exacting subtlety of expression. He views the artifacts of Occupation with irony-between exultant images of Noriko's romantic bicycle ride with Hattori, Ozu wryly shows a roadside Coca-Cola sign—but films the serenity of a tea ceremony with reverence. By the end, Noriko's open and forthright smile becomes a rictus of pain, and neither Japanese tradition nor American-style freedom offers her any relief from the tyranny of love. In Japanese.—R.B. (Japan Society; April 4.)

La Sapienza

This stylized philosophical romance ponders European culture with the unencumbered awe that only an American expat can muster. The director, Eugène Green, a native New Yorker who has been living in France since the nineteen-sixties, focusses on a Parisian couple, Alexandre (Fabrizio Rongione), an architect with mystical yearnings, and Aliénor (Christelle Prot Landman), a sociologist with spiritual inclinations, who head for Italy so that Alexandre can complete his studies of the baroque architect Borromini. There, they encounter another couple, of sorts-Lavinia (Arianna Nastro), a frail young student, and her brother, Goffredo (Ludovico Succio), a teen-age architect-in-training. Aliénor, detecting crisscrossed affinities, dispatches

Goffredo to Rome with Alexandre so that she can stay with Lavinia in the lakeside splendor of Stresa. Green films architectural treasures with analytical wonder; his richly textured images fuse with the story to evoke the essence of humane urbanity and the relationships that it fosters, whether educational, familial, or erotic. In Italian and French.-R.B. (In limited release.)

Serena

Susanne Bier's new film, set in 1929, marks the third pairing of Bradley Cooper and Jennifer Lawrence, after "Silver Linings Playbook" and "American Hustle." He plays George Pemberton, who runs a logging business in the Smoky Mountains; she plays his wife, Serena, an unusual mixture of nature-loving wild child and platinum blonde, who gazes upon him and declares, "Our love began the day we met." Both actors, gracefully dressed and lightly anguished, draw deep on their professional aplomb in a bid to keep a straight face; the credible, bulked-up pain that Cooper brought to "American Sniper" seems a world away. The plot, adapted from the novel by Ron Rash, whisks us from detailed worries about bank loans to the symbolic predations of eagles and panthers; if the result hangs together at all, it's thanks to Morten Søborg, the cinematographer, who worked with Bier on the fine films she made in her native Denmark, and who draws out the surreal contrast between Serena's silks and the wood and iron of her surroundings. With Rhys Ifans, as a hunter who sees visions, and David Dencik, as George's right-hand man and hilariously jealous admirer. -A.L. (In limited release.)

Welcome to New York

This drama by the director Abel Ferrara is loosely based on the French politician Dominique Strauss-Kahn's arrest, in 2011, on charges of sexual assault. But Ferrara departs from the specifics to ferocious effect. Gérard Depardieu, massively Falstaffian, stars as the statesman Devereaux, who checks into the Carlton Hotel, where, after a night with prostitutes, he presses himself naked on a chambermaid (Pamela Afesi) and, later that day, is arrested. As in real life, the charges are ultimately dismissed-but legal guilt isn't Ferrara's subject. Rather, he reveals the terrors of the penal system, a living inferno hidden behind the city's façades and from which its respectable burghers are unduly shielded. While under house arrest in a Tribeca town house, Devereaux is cooped up with his wife, Simone (Jacqueline Bisset), an heiress who has been grooming him to run for President of France. In a spectacular sequence, he cynically contemplates the vanity of power and then confronts her in a flaying battle of mismatched lovers bound together in a death grip. These scenes, which

Ferrara films with plain, wide-eyed terror, are bitterly revelatory about sex, marriage, and ambition. Ferrara has repudiated this R-rated cut made by the film's producers, but he needn't worry: the movie packs a singular, agonized vision that seems entirely the director's own. In English and French.—R.B. (IFC Center and video on demand.)

While We're Young

In Noah Baumbach's new film, Ben Stiller and Naomi Watts play Josh and Cornelia, a married and childless couple who live in New York and worry that their life together, though comfortable, is no fun. Enter a younger couple, Jamie and Darby (Adam Driver and Amanda Seyfried), who take them up and teach them the error, or the frozen timidity, of their ways. The movie is at its simplest—and its best—when setting the tired style of the older folk against the pretensions of the hipsters. (Jamie makes a great show, for instance, of refusing to Google, declaring that he would prefer just not to know.) Needless to say, that insouciance begins to fall apart; we get a fussy plot, woven around the fact that both men make documentaries, as does Cornelia's father (Charles Grodin), and that Jamie is not quite the Zen-tinted joy-bringer that he seemed. The movie is tilted too far toward the male side of the generational clash; Seyfried is often confined to the wings of the action, and, when Watts is given space on center stage, she leaves us craving more. The film feels more blithe than earlier Baumbach projects, yet it's also his most restless rumination on the theme of age; between the zinging jokes and the customary sprees of music, you can hear the ominous pulse of passing time.—A.L. (3/30/15) (In limited release.)

White God

Kornél Mundruczó's film is set in Budapest, where Lili (Zsófia Psotta), age thirteen, is left in the care of her harassed father. Her closest companion is a dog—Hagen, a doting crossbreed whose forehead wrinkles in perplexity as his fortunes turn. He is cast out. forced to make his way on the streets, then captured and trained to fight, with newly sharpened teeth. In the process, we are compelled to ask not just whether he has been brutalized beyond redemption but, even more uncomfortably, to what degree and depth we can ever fathom the nature of a brute. Meanwhile, as Lili searches for her lost pet, her own breed of innocence likewise begins to slip away. The film is too long, and it could use a good shearing, but when Hagen joins together with other mutts to wreak revenge on their oppressors—almost everyone, it seems-this strange fable, rife with political menace, demonstrates both dreaminess and bite. In Hungarian.—A.L. (3/30/15) (In limited release.)





MUSEUMS SHORT LIST METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

"The Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky." Through May 10.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"Jean Dubuffet: Soul of the Underground." Through April 5.

"Simon Denny: The Innovator's Dilemma." Opens April 3.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

"Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian: Infinite Possibility." Through June 3.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

"Basquiat: The Unknown Notebooks." Opens April 3.

FRICK COLLECTION

"Coypel's Don Quixote Tapestries." Through May 17.

MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN

"Richard Estes: Painting New York City." Through Sept. 20.

NEW MUSEUM

"Surround Audience: 2015 Triennial." Through May 15.

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

"Trenton Doyle Hancock: Skin and Bones, 20 Years of Drawings." Through June 28.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES Metropolitan Museum

"Captain Linnaeus Tripe:

Photographer of India and Burma, 1852-1860" Like many of the great nineteenth-

century travel photographers, Tripe, the British officer whose sepia-toned landscapes are gathered here, was both an artist and a colonialist. The pictures he took while a member of the East India Company's army were a way of staking claim to landmarks and wonders in the expanding British Empire and conveying the exotic details to the people back home. Tripe did his job doggedly, producing some twenty-five thousand prints in eight years, but also beautifully. The images here, of temples, tombs, monumental statuary, and intricately carved façades, are serene and skillful. Faced with so much sheer magnificence, Tripe wasn't awestruck; he was respectful and prepared. Through May 25.

Jewish Museum

"Repetition and Difference" To play up their theme of change through recurrence in this millenniaspanning showcase of Judaica and contemporary art, the curators Susan L. Braunstein and Jens Hoffmann rewrote their introductory text four times, in registers that range from cheery P.R. to artspeak. Forgoing any Platonic distinction between original and copy, the curators place dozens of fertility goddesses, ancient shekels, mezuzahs, and intricate floral ketubahs from Isfahan alongside similarly iterative contemporary projects. N. Dash and John Houck

both create abstractions from repeated folds; Abraham Cruzvillegas paints hundreds of found papers of various sizes a unifying gold. One section combines twenty-eight skullcaps, from an intricate Ottoman version in red velvet to Cary Leibowitz's "Stonewall Yarmulke," in silks of pink, white, and blue. Some of the contemporary projects are underwhelming (Koo Jeong-a's stacks of magnets), but on the whole the show succeeds, again and again. Through Aug. 9.

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

Jonathas de Andrade

For several years, the young Brazilian artist has been producing fictional ads for the very real Museum of the Man of the Northeast, an anthropological institution in Andrade's home town of Recife, which takes a romantic view of racial harmony. Andrade's posters of working-class black Brazilians, some with their shirts off, can veer close to prurience, but they do have the virtue of puncturing Brazil's democracia racial: the myth that the country has somehow remained free of discrimination. Through April 11. (Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-367-7474.)

Joo Myung Duck

For his U.S. solo début, the Korean photographer shows handsome black-and-white pictures made over the past fifty years, the oldest of which is a 1965 series of tender but unsentimental portraits taken at a home for mixed-race war orphans.

Landscapes and nature studies, often reduced to dense patterns, are Joo's primary focus and the exhibition's highlight. His images of trees, reeds, and tiny blossoms are almost impenetrably dark, with just enough light to glow like dying embers when seen at close range. The effect is both subtle and seductive, conveying a command of dark tones reminiscent of the master of photographic blackness, Roy DeĈarava. Through April 18. (Yoshinaga, 547 W. 27th St. 212-268-7132.)

Nick Mauss

The lingering touch of a lover's embrace, the social intimacies of a drawing room, and the rambling freedom of a walk in the country combine in this New York native's lovely new show, which is as charged with feeling as it is formally deft. A steel-and-enamel railing—a line that meanders through space—rises slowly up from the entrance, guiding viewers into a room airily filled with mirrored surfaces marked (through a reverse-painting process) with loosely limned figures, twining leaves, and scribblings that suggest the play of light on water. As winter hung on well into March, here was the promise of spring. Through April 11. (303 Gallery, 507 W. 24th St. 212-255-1121.)

"Joseph Beuys Multiples"

The German social sculptor looks less hermetic than usual, thanks to the show's emphasis on his political activities, notably his Organization for Direct Democracy, which advocated decision-making via citizen referenda. ("Conquer the dictatorship of the parties!" he scrawled on a photograph of himself wielding a silver broom.) Beuys designed the German Green Party's campaign poster in 1979 (he was also one of its losing candidates). It shows a giant hare, one of the artist's favorite symbols, facing down an infantryman-its title is "The Invincible." Through April 18. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400.)

"System and Vision"

This dense exhibition of what we still call "outsider art" dives deep into the occult, the obsessive, the erogenous. Morton Bartlett's photographs and drawings of dolls of his own design and William Crawford's orgiastic illustrations on the backs of prison rosters have an erotic intensity that rivals anything by Hans Bellmer or Pierre Klossowski. Yet unlike those established French artists these little-known outsiders worked in total obscurity. Crawford's drawings, for example, were found in an abandoned house in Oakland; nothing is known about him except his name. Through April 18. (Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)



In 1941, when he was twenty-three, the Harlem-based painter Jacob Lawrence completed a sixty-panel series about the Great Migration. (Panel 52, pictured, is captioned "One of the largest race riots occurred in East St. Louis.") MOMA exhibits the entire series for the first time in two decades in "One Way Ticket: Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series and Other Visions of the Great Movement North," opening April 3.



Liz Gerring Dance Company / "Glacier"

First performed at Montclair in 2013, this spare, elegant work now receives a much deserved New York run. Inspired by the sound and atmosphere of Glacier Lake in Colorado—as rendered by the composer Michael J. Schumacher—Gerring's dance is as evocative and mercurial as the weather. The dancers are understated but bracingly athletic; they move with a mixture of precision

and power. Behind them, a bank of panels glows with shifting shades of light, suggesting morphing weather patterns. The effect is both stirring and mysterious. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 31-April 2.)

Rashaun Mitchell

Mitchell is an extraordinary dancer, combining an animal grace with a calmly searching intelligence. He gained renown as a standout member of the final troupe of Merce Cunningham, and the handful of works he has choreographed since then have all been intriguing, succeeding and failing in interesting ways. He has described his new piece "Light Years" in the language of evolution and cosmology. The participation of his former Cunningham colleagues Silas Riener and Melissa Toogood should insure physical excitement that isn't just theoretical. (New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. April 1-4.)

"Sila Djiguiba: Path of Hope"

Dancers from the Maimouna Keita African Dance Company, based in Brooklyn, perform an evening of traditional African dance fused with urban forms like house and voguing, accompanied by a djembe drum ensemble. The dances are built around the story of a young African performer who travels to New York to experience the wider world of dance, despite parental disapproval. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. April 4.)

Dorrance Dance

Michelle Dorrance is the most original choreographer in tap dancing today, but much of her "Blues Project," which débuted at Jacob's Pillow in 2013, is rather conventional. The conventions are pleasing: first-rate traditional tap mixed with a touch of Appalachian clogging and Lindy Hop, set to a score by Toshi Reagon (who plays live with her band) that ranges across blues

urban, rural, and indie. Only in the solos of Dorrance and her co-stars, Derick K. Grant and especially Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards, does the high virtuosity reach deeper into blues emotions. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. April 4-5.)

Noche Flamenca / "Cambio de Tercio"

Flamenco comes in many shapes and sizes, but the night club, in many ways, is its natural habitat. Sitting up close to the tiny stage at Joe's Pub, one can see the unfiltered force of Soledad Barrio's dancing and the daunting physical effort behind it. (Such proximity adds to, rather than diminishes, the dance's over-all effect.) Juan Ogalla, Barrio's alter ego, provides a welcome foil, playful, showy, grandiloquent. Noche Flamenca's excellent musical trio completes the experience. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. April 4-7. Through April 10.)

ABOVE BEYOND

NYC / CUNY Chapbook Festival

This seventh annual festival, recognizing the affordable and portable format's importance for emerging writers and alternative publishers in today's increasingly paperless world, includes workshops on hand bookbinding and letterpress printing, a tour of the New York Public Library's chapbook collection, a book fair, readings, and talks. Highlights include the opening of an exhibition of work by Edward Sanders, "Seeking the Glyph," which includes a talk by Sanders; celebrations of five years of Lost & Found, a chapbook publishing project by CUNY's Graduate Center, with appearances by Dorothy Wang, Thurston Moore, Anne Waldman, and others; and the Poetry Society of America Chapbook Fellowship Award Ceremony, featuring readings by this year's winners, as well as by the poet-judges Elizabeth Alexander, Forrest Gander, Marilyn Hacker, and Jean Valentine. (chapbookfestival. org. March 31-April 2.)

"Birdman"

There's plenty to love in Alejandro González Iñárritu's Academy Award-winning black comedy "Birdman," not least of which is the original score, a visceral, improvised

set of percussive jazz written and performed by the Grammy-winning drummer Antonio Sánchez. His music, which was not eligible for a Best Original Score Oscar (the film also features more than a half hour of non-original classical material), flutters in fits and starts across a traditional trap set, with each character granted a recurring rhythmic theme. While the soundtrack does stand on its own, it soars underneath Michael Keaton and Ed Norton's spontaneous, feverish performances, and this week Sánchez comes to the Upper West Side for a rare performance of his score while the film is screened. (New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St. April 4 at 8. wordlessmusic.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Generations of pop nostalgists have pondered the inscrutable lyrics to Don McLean's "American Pie." On April 7, Mr. McLean puts the original manuscript-sixteen pages in all, some handwritten and some typed-up for auction at Christie's as a single lot, to the delight of good ol' boys everywhere. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) • Among the top lots at Swann's sale of African-American art—an area of particular strength at this auction house—are a Corot-like landscape by Henry Ossawa Tanner and the über-cool "Steve," a portrait of a handsome young man wearing a white trenchcoat and mirrored sunglasses, by Barkley L. Hendricks (April 2). (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.) • On April 1, Sotheby's starts the day off with a sale of photographs that includes a full set of Nicholas Nixon's "Brown Sisters," a series of portraits of four Connecticut sisters taken yearly over the course of four

decades. Then, in the evening, the house holds an eccentric sale of New York-related objects, everything from a diamond-encrusted bracelet inspired by the design of the Chrysler Building to a nine-foot-tall bronze replica of

the Statue of Liberty. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) • Phillips offers two days of photographs on April 1-2, including works by Arbus, Penn, Sherman, and Man Ray, among others. (450 Park Ave. 212-940-1200.)

READINGS AND TALKS

"Book Cooks"

This new food-related series, organized by Greenlight Bookstore and the dining emporium Berg'n, starts with the brothers Max and Eli Sussman, authors of "Classic Recipes for Modern People," in conversation with Eric Demby, a founder of the Brooklyn Flea. (Berg'n, 899 Bergen St., Crown Heights, Brooklyn. greenlightbookstore.com/bookcooks. April 2 at 7:30.)

Jay Wright

The seventy-nine-year-old poet, who last read from his work in New York City in 2004, visits the 92nd Street Y. (Lexington Ave at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. April 2 at 8:15.)

Housing Works Bookstore Café

The actress and poet Amber Tamblyn's new book, "Dark Sparkler," was inspired by the tragic deaths of such actresses as Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield and includes art work by David Lynch, Marilyn Manson, and Marcel Dzama. On April 6 at 7, she reads from it, in an event featuring the indie-rock group Yo La Tengo. The poet Dorothea Lasky is the host. (126 Crosby St. 212-334-3324.)

"Open Books"

Theatre for a New Audience's ongoing literary series presents the *New Yorker* contributor and former theatre critic John Lahr, who will talk about his most recent biography, "Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh." (Polonsky Shakespeare Center, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. tfana. org/openbooks. April 6 at 7.)

Renata Adler

The journalist discusses her latest book, "After the Tall Timber: Collected Nonfiction." (McNally Jackson Books, 52 Prince St. No tickets necessary. April 7 at 7.)

Barnes & Noble

Gretchen Rubin, the author of "The Happiness Project," discusses her new book, "Better Than Before: Mastering the Habits of Our Everyday Lives," with the writer Arianna Huffington, who will also share insights about her latest book, "Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder." (Broadway at 82nd St. No tickets necessary. April 7 at 7.)



TABLES FOR TWO

JAVELINA

119 E. 18th St. (212-539-0202)

JUST AS NEW YORKERS LIKE to complain that it's impossible to get a good bagel outside the five boroughs, Texans enjoy lamenting the lack of decent Tex-Mex outside the Lone Star State. It seems especially egregious in a city so full of both places to eat and displaced Texans. So word spread quickly about Javelina, a restaurant near Union Square claiming to offer "true Tex-Mex," as advertised by a green neon sign that casts an eerie glow over a row of tall cacti just inside the door. Within days of opening, reservations were already hard to come by, with wait times creeping up to two hours.

The people wanted their enchiladas and their fajitas, but, more than anything, they wanted their queso. *Queso* is the generic Spanish word for "cheese," but Texan queso, also known as chile con queso, is a very specific dish, taken very seriously, and, naturally, a source of great debate, down to pronunciation: "keh-so" not "kay-so," according to *Texas Monthly*. Opinions and recipes vary, but it seems generally agreed upon that the cheese should be mild and melted to a Velveeta-like consistency, mixed with chiles, then scooped up with tortilla chips—preferably of the sturdy, crunchy, salt-flecked, golden variety, like the ones that come in a basket, still hot from the fryer, at Javelina. These are complimentary, along with a sweet, smoky salsa; the queso is compulsory, but must be ordered separately. There are two kinds: yellow and white, the former slightly runnier, with a distinct subtle tang and chopped tomatillo and serrano, the latter a bit more creamy, offset by jalapeño and roasted poblano. Both get a dollop of pico de gallo, can be further jazzed up with a variety of toppings—guacamole, chorizo, ground beef—and wash down well with an avocado-cilantro margarita or a Smoky Negroni, made with habanero bitters and mezcal instead of gin.

It's hard to imagine eating anything else after all that melted cheese, especially because it's hard not to eat all of that melted cheese. In its early days, the kitchen at Javelina seemed like it was still getting its footing beyond the queso. The avocado in the avocado tacos turned out to be fried in a flavor-diminishing floury coating. The chicken-fried steak lost any crispness it once had under the weight of a creamy gravy. The parrillada mixta, or mixed grill, on the other hand, was a sight to behold: a cast-iron contraption piled with fajita-style sliced chicken and steak, shreds of carnitas, peppery jalapeño sausage, bacon-wrapped shrimp, and plump drumsticks of barbecued quail, sticky with a honey glaze. With an assortment of accoutrements, including a stack of tortillas and a softball-size scoop of sour cream, it could happily feed a family of six. "Serves 1-2," says the menu. Texas portions.

—Hannah Goldfield



BAR TAB BUTTER & SCOTCH

818 Franklin Ave., Brooklyn (347-350-8899)

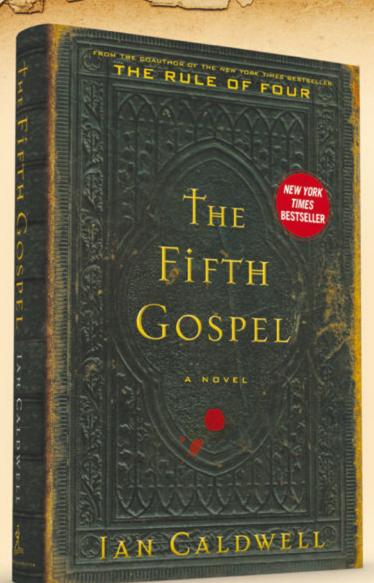
Baking is a pursuit for the precise; a teaspoon is not a teaspoonish. Expert drinkers can be just as finicky—the mixologist brandishing an atomizer, or Winston Churchill, gazing upon a closed bottle of vermouth while making his Martini. But one gets the sense that the duo behind Brooklyn's self-professed "first dessert and craft cocktail bar" is less uptight. The owners, Keavy Blueher (of Smorgasburg's Kumquat Cupcakery) and Allison Kave (of First Prize Pies), are straight out of your indie-movie dreams-drunken pixie dream ladies serving up s'mores pie and jello shots. On a recent evening, what one visitor called "shouty oldies" ("Tutti Frutti," "Susie Q") blasted, cupcake wrappers cast off by the tipsy were crushed underfoot in lieu of peanut shells, and a buttery smell seemed to be piped in, like oxygen at a casino. The scene was spiked Classic American Diner by way of Epcot. A patron compared her Union Street Collins (vodka, hibiscus-clove simple syrup, lemon, bitters, seltzer) not unfavorably to Now and Laters. Couples locked eyes over other dehydratingly sweet beverages, but even the soothing power of a hot buttered Scotch and possibly the best birthday cake ever couldn't allay one fight. "I'm not a child!" yelled a man drinking at a place that deals in pink icing and rainbow sprinkles. A nearby neon sign suggested, "Eat pie."

-Emma Allen



THE INSTANT NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

"This smart, suspenseful thriller by the coauthor of *The Rule of Four* is a must for Dan Brown fans." —People



"Kicks off at 90 mph and doesn't slow down."

—Associated Press

"Captivating...An emotional journey nearly two thousand years in the making." —Library Journal (starred review)

"The Fifth Gospel is nothing short of groundbreaking—a literary feast wrapped around an intriguing murder mystery."

—Nelson DeMille

"It will change the way you look at organized religion, humanity, and perhaps yourself."

—David Baldacci

"Spectacular...This superb Rubik's Cube of a novel is the best of its kind, right up until the final shock....Deliciously labyrinthine."

-Providence Journal

"An amazing achievement: The Fifth Gospel is a gripping thriller rich with human drama and forbidden knowledge." —Lev Grossman

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT A CALCULATED RISK

In 1974, the Ford Administration conducted nuclear talks with Iran. Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, heir to the Peacock Throne and an American ally, had asserted his country's right to build nuclear power plants. Henry Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft sought a deal to reduce the risk that Iran could ever make an atomic bomb. They had to manage a restive Congress. A secret White House memo summarizing the problem noted that "special safeguards [that] might be satisfactory to Congress . . . are proving unacceptable to Iran."

Ford's talks failed, as did negotiations undertaken by the Carter Administration. In 1979, the Shah fell to the Iranian Revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini, believing that nuclear weapons were un-Islamic, initially put Iran's program on ice. After Khomeini's death, in 1989, his successors bargained, smuggled, and dissembled, and by 2009 they had installed enough equipment to make a bomb within a few years. This was President Obama's inheritance. After six years of diplomacy, capped by energetic negotiations led by Secretary of State John Kerry—who seems on some days to be the only man in Washington enjoying his job—the Administration may at last have a deal in sight, judging from recent statements made by Kerry and by his Iranian counterparts.

The precise details of Obama's offer are unknown. Broadly,

Iran would freeze its program in such a way that, if it broke the agreement, it would need at least another year to make a bomb, and it would accept special inspections. In return, the U.S., the European Union, Russia, and China would agree to the lifting of economic sanctions. Republicans positioning themselves for 2016 have denounced any deal. Their opportunism, abetted by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's divisive address to Congress earlier this month, has made it hard for Obama to clarify his argument: the bargain may carry risks, but it is better than any practical alternative.

One risk of any deal is that Iran will

cheat successfully, as it has before. Between 2004 and 2009, it built a huge centrifuge facility under a mountain south of Tehran before Western intelligence agencies found out about the deception. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran still hasn't come clean about its long history of secret weapons work. Yet Republican fear-mongering is overblown. The technology for detecting secret nuclear activity through atmospheric and water sampling, among other methods, isn't foolproof, but it is very good. Large-scale cheating of the sort necessary to finish a bomb, which would require enriching uranium isotopes, would carry a significant risk of detection. If caught, Iran would likely face harsher economic sanctions, if not war.

A greater dilemma is that, by easing economic sanctions, a deal might empower Iran at a time when collapsing oil prices could reduce its ability to fund violent militias around the Middle East. The latest chapter of the Sunni-Shiite conflict is descending into a Thirty Years' War of grotesquery—mass abductions, sexual slavery, tweeted beheadings. There are few innocents under arms, but Iran's aggression is catalytic.

The Revolutionary Guards have trained Hezbollah's fighters in Lebanon and Syria and provided the group with hundreds of millions of dollars. There is evidence that officers from Iran's

Quds Force, the hardcore Special Forces of the Guards, are fighting alongside the barrel-bombing military of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Iran's proxy violence does not cut entirely against American interests. Some of its enemies are also American enemies: the Islamic State and Al Qaeda. But many more Iranian foes are American allies, including Israel. Last week, a fragmented Yemen saw its civil war deepen further as Saudi Arabian warplanes intervened to bomb Shiite rebels backed by Iran.

These days, however, Iran looks overextended. Sanctions have cut the country's oil exports by half, and the economy is contracting. The apparent willingness



of the radical wing of Tehran's regime to consider the nuclear freeze offered by the Obama Administration—a deal similar to ones that have failed previously—might be explained by the need to replenish the Revolutionary Guards's ectarian war chest.

How would lifting sanctions not simply revitalize Iran's expansionism? If the Administration doesn't have a plan, it should devise one. Last week, in Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's home town, American warplanes, in tacit alliance with Iranian-backed Shiite militias, bombed Islamic State positions, only to have several of the militias withdraw in protest. Obama has committed the U.S. to what looks to be a long war in Iraq, with Iran's help; an attack on the large city of Mosul is due soon. The Islamic State has thrived because it has captured the grievances and bitter desperation of Iraq's Sunni minority. Attacking the Sunnis with Shiite fighters is like trying to put out a fire with gasoline. If Iran's proxies in Iraq gain more access to guns and money because of a nuclear deal with the West, that may only make things worse.

The record of Washington's interventions in the sectarian landscape of Iran and Iraq is so abysmal that the case for restraint should be obvious. The Reagan Administration carried out a morally debased effort to foster mutual destruction between the two countries during the war that they fought from 1980 to 1988. (At the war's inconclusive end, as Saddam

Hussein gassed Iranian positions, the head of the Revolutionary Guards wrote to Khomeini suggesting that, if Iran wanted to prevail, it needed nukes.) The Bush Administration invaded Iraq to topple Saddam, only to reignite sectarian fighting and, while disenfranchising Sunnis, open a pathway for Iranian aggression.

One aim of Kerry's dealmaking in Switzerland is to help stabilize the region by reducing the chance that Iran's bomb program could set off a local atomic arms race. That is an objective worthy of considerable risk-taking. But a deal might achieve more stability—and go down better in Congress—if it was accompanied by a broader political strategy designed to separate Shiite and Sunni fighters, promote autonomy and self-governance for Sunnis opposed to the Islamic State, reduce violence, and stop Iran from intervening in Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Bahrain, and Gaza.

For four decades, American Presidents of both parties have recognized that it is unacceptable for Iran to acquire a nuclear bomb, and that the only rational way to prevent this is to negotiate. After six years in office, and after repeatedly following the advice of his generals, only to see their predictions fail, Obama is choosing the risks of nuclear diplomacy over yet more war. It is the best of bad options, but it could be better still.

—Steve Coll

TAKE TWO FIBREGLASS MENAGERIE



In the mid-nineteen-nineties, Charles Grodin retired from acting and withdrew to Connecticut, to spend more time with his wife, Elissa, his young son, and a collection of life-size fibreglass animals—including a buffalo—that he installed in his back yard. He wrote books filled with lightly curmudgeonly anecdotes and began recording one-minute syndicated commentaries, about this and that, for CBS Radio, sometimes ending with the words "Oh, boy."

But, a few years ago, when Grodin was in his mid-seventies, he began to act again: demand for his representations of pained, wincing men somehow overpowered his wish never to leave Wilton. For example, Grodin played a recurring character—an unsolicitous, if insightful, doctor—in the fourth season of "Louie."

At eleven-thirty on a recent morning, Grodin was not far from his home, in the Red Barn restaurant, in the shadow of the Merritt Parkway. Staff members

greeted him as "Mr. G."; the hits of the Carpenters, including "Top of the World," played on the sound system. Grodin—baseball cap, zip-up corduroy jacket, wan smile—said that he hadn't been out to the movies in fifteen years. When he is offered work, "I never say, 'How much?' I say, 'Where?'" He praised Louis C.K. for getting him home at a reasonable hour. Grodin then described his first day on "While We're Young," Noah Baumbach's new comedy, in which he plays Ben Stiller's father-in-law. Baumbach spent perhaps two hours shooting a brief scene in which Grodin has his bow tie adjusted by Naomi Watts. Quoting a remark made by the actor Joe Bologna during a visit to the Universal Studios theme park, Grodin asked Baumbach, "Who do you have to fuck to get off this tour?"

Grodin ordered a turkey club sandwich and described his garden animals. "I'm kind of on hold for a cow right now," he said. He started his collection after a visit to United House Wrecking, in Stamford. "I decided—I don't know why—that I was going to get a number of these. My wife looked at me. She calls it Chuck's World."

He went on, "That's O.K., but then I wired them for sound. And it wasn't the sound of a horse or a buffalo or an elephant or a dog—it was me doing different dialects. Like the buffalo has a Yiddish dialect. And the elephant is an upper-class English." Impersonating his elephant, he said, "'Have you been talking to Bob the buffalo?" Each animal has only one short recorded speech. The loudspeakers are hidden in the undergrowth. Referring to the over-all effect, Grodin said, "It's a good idea. I activate them with a remote control from a golf cart. I wouldn't do it for myself; you'd only do it for somebody who's never



Charles Grodin

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heard it. Here's the horse: he goes, 'Mr. Ed, Francis the Talking Mule, and I all studied with Strasberg. Fran is actually a talking horse, but he calls himself a talking mule. That's his humor. Go figure.'" Grodin claimed that even the elephant is full-size, but then thought for a moment: "Well, I'm sure there are bigger elephants."

Grodin, widely admired for his disobliging performances on late-night talk shows, once had dinner with Johnny Carson, who asked if he'd join him on an African safari. "He was serious. I have a place in Manhattan—I barely go there. I said, 'Being in a tent with wild animals trying to get in at us?" Grodin told Carson, on the air, about growing up within earshot of the Pittsburgh Zoo: Grodin would lie in bed, tell himself a joke, and wait for the hyenas to laugh. "Elissa saw that, and got an assignment from American Film to interview me, and within thirty minutes of the tape recorder being on I asked her to shut it off, and at the end of the next thirty minutes I was discussing marriage with her, and now we've been married thirty-three years."

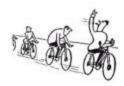
His wife had asked him to buy something for her printer. He also needed corduroy pants. After leaving the Red Barn—"So long, Mr. G."—Grodin drove to a mall in Norwalk. In the car, he recalled that Cybill Shepherd, his co-star

in "The Heartbreak Kid," had mentioned in a memoir that they had once slept together. "I said, 'Why would you put that in a book?' She said, 'You should be grateful I included you.'"

The men's section in Marshalls disappointed him. "This is all lightweight," Grodin said. "I don't see anything flannel." Walking across to Staples, he described his exercise regimen: "I used to have a treadmill that I would look at." A young woman was wearing a red Staples uniform and a red Staples name tag. "You work here, right?" he asked her, and she laughed and pointed the way to the ink-and-toner wall.

—Ian Parker

SECOND CITY DEPT. IRON MAYOR



Steven Fulop, the mayor of Jersey City, has a Kuota K-Factor bike with Mavic Cosmic Carbone SLS wheels. "It's for triathletes," he said, as he walked out of City Hall and along the bike lane on Grove Street. He wore a long brown coat and a blue-and-red tie. "I did an Ironman—that's with a two-and-a-half-

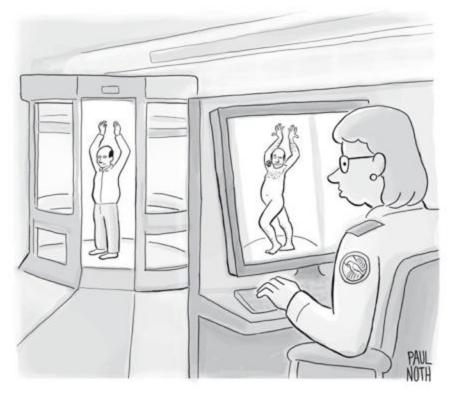
mile swim, a hundred and twelve miles on the bike, and then a marathon," he said. "Now I do the half Ironman. In the mornings, I train." This involves a 5:40 A.M. bike ride: twenty-five miles, up to the George Washington Bridge and back. Fulop, who is thirty-eight, has posted on Twitter and Facebook about his athletic pursuits, his encounters with tapas chefs and local artists, and a free heart checkup with Dr. Oz. He moved to Jersey City in 2000, and, after stints in the Marine Corps and at Goldman Sachs, he was sworn in as mayor in 2013. "We're not yet at the forefront of toptier midsize cities," he said. "Starting to do things like bike-share systems is how we're going to get there."

In January, Fulop announced that Jersey City will start a program that connects to Citibike, in New York, allowing a person to hop on a bike, ride it to the PATH station, turn in the first bike, and pick up a new one on the other side of the river. He envisages the program attracting New Yorkers who want to spend the day in Jersey City. "The views of Manhattan are second to none," he said.

He strolled toward Grove Street Plaza, which during the summer, he said, is "literally filled, filled, filled with bikes, so this is an ideal place for one of the larger docking stations." He looked around. Behind him was an Asian fusion place and a Duane Reade. He added, "There was nothing here. It was empty. In the past four years it's been on *steroids*."

A few bikes were chained to sign poles. "We started off with a program that was going to be Hoboken, Jersey City, and Weehawken together on the bike shares," he said. But Fulop dropped out. "There became a difference of opinion," he explained. "The other two towns were more conscious of the price, because the system to integrate with New York is more expensive."

Fulop has raised about two and a half million dollars from sponsors, enough to pay for the first order of bikes—three hundred and fifty of them, at five thousand dollars each, to be delivered in late summer. (As with Citibike, the color scheme goes to the highest corporate bidder.) He broke the news to the other New Jersey mayors gently. "It wasn't the best of conversations," he said. Dawn Zimmer, the mayor of Hoboken, said, "My priority was



city-wide, and his priority was connection to New York City." The bikes in the program she is running with Weehawken will cost less than a third of what Fulop's cost.

Some people refer to Jersey City as New York's sixth borough. "We'd be foolish if we didn't try to capitalize on the proximity," Fulop said. When his office approached Mayor de Blasio's people about the program, he said, "they were supportive but relatively indifferent." He continued, "They have their own challenges there. They weren't really thinking about what's happening across the river."

Fulop popped into Grove Street Bicycles, where he buys parts for his Kuota. The proprietor, Rodney Morweiser, greeted him with a "Sup." He had a long goatee and wore a mechanic's shirt. He pulled out a bicycle that resembled a Manhattan Citibike. "Something like this is more casual, unisex," Morweiser said. "The handlebars are higher rise, so it's more comfortable. This is perfect for just knockin' around town."

Fulop gravitated toward another bike, near the front of the store, with wheels almost as thick as truck tires. "Maybe I should ride the fat bike," he said.

Morweiser shook his head. "That's extreme," he said. "You can ride on sand, you can ride on snow. Imagine—three, four inches of snow, just flyin' around in the park. It's a blast. Ultimate in traction."

Fulop lingered for a moment, and then returned to the knockin'-around bike and rolled it out the door. The cashier ran to bring the Mayor a helmet. Fulop started pedalling on the sidewalk. Then he said, "Don't ride on the sidewalk!" He swerved over to the street. "I wouldn't mind using it to get to a ribbon cutting," he said.

—Betsy Morais

THE BOARDS LIKENESSES



Modern politicians are relentlessly photographed, but Beltway paparazzi shots don't hold a candle to oil on canvas when it comes to revealing character. Recently, the portrait artist

Nelson Shanks (past subjects: Princess Diana, Pope John Paul II) divulged that his painting of Bill Clinton, currently hanging in the National Portrait Gallery, contains a hidden image: a shadow across the Oval Office mantel was painted in the shape of Monica Lewinsky's blue dress. Clinton, Shanks told the Philadelphia *Daily News*, was "probably the most famous liar of all time," and the shadow has both literal and symbolic meaning. The "Da Vinci Code" sequel writes itself.

Days earlier, in California, another portrait of a chastened spouse made news when facial-recognition technology revealed that a sixteenthcentury painting commonly thought to be of Jane Seymour, the third wife of Henry VIII, more likely depicts her predecessor Anne Boleyn, who was beheaded on charges of treason, incest, and adultery. Both wives feature in Hilary Mantel's novels "Wolf Hall" and "Bring Up the Bodies"; the Royal Shakespeare Company's stage adaptation opens next week on Broadway, in a two-part epic with a cast of twentythree. In London, the actors made several field trips, including a tenmile boat ride to Hampton Court as Thomas Cromwell might have made when summoned by King Henry after hours—and a visit to England's National Portrait Gallery, where they saw a likeness of Henry by Hans Holbein the Younger.

There are bits of the House of Tudor to be found in New York as well. Two days after the R.S.C. actors arrived, they set off for the Frick Collection, on the Upper East Side. They crowded into the Living Hall, an oak-panelled room with roped-off antique furniture. Flanking a stone fireplace were Holbein's portraits of Thomas More and Thomas Cromwell, both major characters in the plays. "It's obvious that Frick thought of them as a couple," a curator named Xavier Salomon said, of the Gilded Age industrialist who filled his mansion with art.

"An ill-fated couple," another curator, Susan Galassi, added. Cromwell investigated More for treason, which resulted in More's beheading. (Imagine a Ken Starr portrait next to the Clinton.)

"We don't really know what Hol-

bein thought of More, but presumably he liked him," Salomon said.

"He lived with him. He spent a lot of time with him," Galassi said.

"But living with someone doesn't mean you necessarily like them," Salomon countered.

Mantel, who was in town from London with her husband, the geologist Gerald McEwen, peered up at the portraits. "More was so image conscious. He was such a great self-publicist. You imagine him taking considerable solemn pleasure in sitting for his portrait. Cromwell was always on the move." While Holbein's More seems relaxed, Cromwell looks agitated, his eyes darting off to the side. "His favorite words are 'speed,' 'haste,' 'please accelerate this," Mantel continued. "On the upside of his letters, he writes, 'With speed.' It can't be easy to catch someone like that to sit for a portrait."

"He looks annoyed," Ben Miles, who plays Cromwell, said, chewing gum. "He wants to be somewhere else."

Nathaniel Parker, who plays King Henry, asked, "What did Frick use this room for? Just hanging out with the paintings?"

"This was a sitting room," Salomon said, "where he would look at pictures after dinner and invite his friends."

"I probably missed this bit of information—how did Frick make his money?" Lucy Briers, who plays Katherine of Aragon, asked. (Answer: coke and steel.)

John Ramm, who plays More, studied the portrait of his character. "He's someone who doesn't necessarily take care of himself. You can see the religious fervor in his eyes. But he's so proud of his chain, his costume, his velvet." Salomon pointed out More's five-o'clock shadow, which was flecked with white. "Oh, my God, yes!" Ramm said, leaning closer.

Nearby, Parker and Miles dissected Cromwell. "He's got a big thumb, doesn't he?" Miles said, holding up his own for comparison.

Parker eyed Cromwell's fur collar: "You just want to scrunch it."

As Miles walked out past the Cromwell, he said, "It's as close as you get to meeting the guy." He looked around. "Some house, eh?"

—Michael Schulman

THE FINANCIAL PAGE THE PUERTO RICAN PROBLEM

In 1958, Laurance Rockefeller threw an inaugural party for Dorado Beach, his luxury resort on the northern coast of Puerto Rico. The guests included millionaires, politicians, and movie stars. In the years that followed, Dorado became the most glamorous resort in the Caribbean, attracting everyone from Ava Gardner to John F. Kennedy. But, as time passed, resorts on other islands lured high-end travellers away, and Dorado eventually became a charming relic. In 2006, it closed. History had passed it by.

Puerto Ricans could have been forgiven for thinking the same was true of the island generally. It had been one of the great postwar economic-development success stories, turn-

ing itself from a poor, largely rural society into a manufacturing powerhouse with a thriving middle class. But by the nineteen-nineties the economy had slowed, and then it went off the rails. Puerto Rico has been in and out of recession since 2006. Its unemployment rate is around fourteen per cent; fortyfive per cent of the population lives below the federal poverty line; and there's a fiscal crisis—a scramble to restructure debts of seventy-three billion dollars. Last year, the new governor, Alejandro Padilla, said, "We've proved that Puerto Rico is not Detroit and not Greece." As boasts go, that's hardly encouraging.

Puerto Rico's difficulties are rooted, in part, in its earlier success. Its path to industrialization was paved with corpo-

rate tax breaks. The most important one was Section 936 of the U.S. tax code. (Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory.) This went into effect in 1976, and exempted the profits earned by American companies from federal taxes. Mauro Guillén, a management professor at Wharton and an expert in emerging markets, told me, "Puerto Rico became, by a wide margin, the most attractive locale in the world for American companies to operate in." Between 1970 and 1980, manufacturing's share of the G.N.P. nearly doubled, as firms, especially pharmaceutical companies, opened plants across the island. (I lived there for four years starting in the late seventies, when my dad ran a plant for Loctite.) At one point, Guillén says, more than half the drugs sold in the U.S. were manufactured in Puerto Rico.

The problem was that the growth depended on that crucial tax break, and in 1996 Congress began phasing it out. It expired completely a decade later, and, as the subsidies disappeared, so did many factories, relocating to places where labor was cheaper and regulation lighter. Between 1996 and 2014, the number of manufacturing jobs on the island fell by almost

half. Last year, the island's Secretary of Economic Development, Alberto Bacó Bagué, said that, once the island's tax exemption expired, "we kind of disappeared from the map."

This has left Puerto Rico scrambling to come up with a new economic strategy, and there are plans for the island to "reinvent" itself—plans replete with buzzwords of the moment, such as "cloud computing," "the app economy," and "innovative entrepreneurship." There's nothing wrong with any of these ideas—entrepreneurship is great. But what's missing is a focus on a simple question: what can Puerto Rico offer that other locations can't? As Guillén puts it, in a world where capital hopscotches freely from place to place, "countries need to capitalize on their distinctive advantages."

As it happens, Puerto Rico has plenty of those: political stability, participation in the U.S. legal and economic systems, an educated and skilled workforce. But it needs to do a better job of exploiting and advertising those advantages. Heidie Calero, a consultant based in Puerto Rico, told me, "One of

our main problems is that not many people in the U.S. or the world know that Puerto Rico exists under the U.S. flag and with the U.S. dollar as its currency."

More important, Puerto Rico should pluck its low-hanging fruit. Take tourism. Puerto Rico has glorious beaches, tremendous weather, and wonderfully varied topography. Americans can get there easily and without a passport. English is spoken almost everywhere. It should be a tourist mecca. Yet policy-makers neglected tourism for decades, while other Caribbean countries aggressively wooed hotel chains and bolstered infrastructure. (In the past forty years, the number of hotel rooms in the Dominican Republic went from three thousand to more than seventy thousand,

sand to more than seventy thousand, while the number of hotel rooms in Puerto Rico rose by just seven thousand.) As a result, Puerto Rico has been eclipsed. In 1980, according to a study by Calero's company, it accounted for more than a quarter of all the tourist revenue in the Caribbean. By 2012, that number was down to fifteen per cent. And tourism accounted for less than five per cent of Puerto Rico's G.D.P.

Tourism isn't a panacea. And it's not as buzzy or cool as the app economy. But if you want to reinvent the Puerto Rican economy it's a good place to start. This won't be an easy task: when you neglect an industry for years, it erodes the skill and knowledge base of workers and managers alike. But Puerto Rico is increasing its marketing push and improving its infrastructure. The main airport is in the middle of a huge makeover, and there's been a mini-boom in luxury hotels. Dorado Beach is once again the site of an opulent resort, an ultraluxury Ritz-Carlton property that cost more than three hundred million dollars to build. Puerto Rico seems to be reappearing on the map. The question is whether this time it can stay there.

—James Surowiecki



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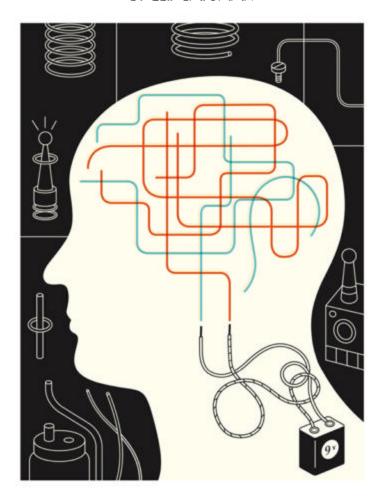
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ANNALS OF THE MIND

ELECTRIFIED

Adventures in transcranial direct-current stimulation.

BY ELIF BATUMAN



"What does this part of the brain do, again?" I asked, pointing to the electrode on my right temple.

"That's the right inferior frontal cortex," said Vince Clark, the director of the University of New Mexico Psychology Clinical Neuroscience Center, in Albuquerque. "It does a lot of things. It evaluates rules. People get thrown in jail when it's impaired. It might help solve math problems. You can't really isolate what it does. It has emotional components."

It was early December, and night was falling, though it was barely five. The shadows were getting longer in the lab. My legs felt unusually calm. Something somewhere was buzzing. Outside the

window, a tree stood black against the deepening sky.

"Verbal people tend to get really quiet," Clark said softly. "That's one effect we noticed. And it can do funny things with your perception of time."

The device administering the current started to beep, and I saw that twenty minutes had passed. As the current returned to zero, I felt a slight burning under the electrodes—both the one on my right temple and another, on my left arm. Clark pressed some buttons, trying to get the beeping to stop. Finally, he popped out the battery, the nine-volt rectangular kind.

This was my first experience of trans-

The new therapy aims to stimulate the brain with small currents applied to the scalp.

cranial direct-current stimulation, or tDCS—a portable, cheap, low-tech procedure that involves sending a low electric current (up to two milliamps) to the brain. Research into tDCS is in its early stages. A number of studies suggest that it may improve learning, vigilance, intelligence, and working memory, as well as relieve chronic pain and the symptoms of depression, fibromyalgia, Parkinson's, and schizophrenia. However, the studies have been so small and heterogeneous that meta-analyses have failed to prove any conclusive effects, and long-term risks have not been established. The treatment has yet to receive F.D.A. approval, although a few hospitals, including Beth Israel, in New York, and Beth Israel Deaconess, in Boston, have used it to treat chronic pain and depression.

"What's the plan now?" Clark asked, unhooking the electrodes. I could see he was ready to answer more questions. But, as warned, I felt almost completely unable to speak. It wasn't like grasping for words; it was like no longer knowing what words were good for.

Clark offered to drive me back to my hotel. Everything was mesmerizing: a dumpster in the rear-view camera, the wide roads, the Route 66 signs, the Land of Enchantment license plates.

After some effort, I managed to ask about a paper I'd read regarding the use of tDCS to treat tinnitus. My father has tinnitus; the ringing in his ears is so loud it wakes him up at night. I had heard that some people with tinnitus were helped by earplugs, but my father wasn't, so where in the head was tinnitus, and were there different kinds?

"There are different kinds," Clark said.
"Sometimes, there's a real noise. It's rare, but it happens with dogs." He told me a story about a dog with this rare affliction. When a microphone was placed in its ear, everyone could hear a ringing tone—the result, it turned out, of an oversensitive tympanic membrane. "The poor dog," he said.

We drove the rest of the way in silence.

Growing up in Detroit, Clark was interested in philosophy and thought he would study it in college. But, after realizing that all the questions that interested him came down to perception and the brain, he majored in psychobiology, at U.C.L.A. This was in the

nineteen-eighties. "By luck, I picked a field that was about to explode," he said.

As an undergraduate, Clark took a job at a hospital, building electrodes for insertion into the brains of epileptics during surgery, to locate the epileptic regions of the brain and the regions necessary for cognitive function. The patient's head would be sawed open under local anesthetic. Fully conscious, the patient would be shown flashcards with words or pictures while the electrodes recorded which regions responded to the stimuli. Clark was deeply impressed by how localized neuronal responses were. Sometimes, a picture of a particular celebrity would cause a single neuron to become especially active. Similar observations led scientists in a later study to posit the existence in one patient of a "Halle Berry neuron."

Just before Clark got his Ph.D., the fMRI machine was developed—a huge moment for neuroscience. The technology measures brain activity in real time, by monitoring blood flow. Scientists today can look at an fMRI and see what happens in the brain of a pianist playing Bartók, a Carmelite nun having a religious experience, a depressed person contemplating suicide, or a schizophrenic hearing voices. As a professor at the University of Connecticut Health Center, Clark began working on an addiction study, using fMRI to look at the brains of recovering addicts. To his surprise, he noticed that the fMRI could show which of the recovered addicts were likely to relapse in six months. Clark believes that it may be possible to stimulate a relapser's brain with tDCS to make it look and act more like a non-relapser's.

The precise physical mechanism of tDCS remains mysterious. The electric current used is too low to cause resting neurons to fire. Instead, it seems to make neurons more or less likely to fire, by changing the electrical potential of nerve-cell membranes. In other words, although tDCS can't create new neural activity, it can enhance or reduce existing activity. The procedure uses direct current, so it has positive and negative electrodes and can have both inhibitory and excitatory effects: in general, positive current stimulates neural activity while negative current inhibits it.

Clark began working on tDCS in

2007, shortly after being named scientific director of the Mind Research Network at the University of New Mexico. Funded by DARPA, the research division of the Department of Defense, his first study determined that tDCS can help subjects learn to detect hidden threats in complex images. The researchers used images from DARWARS, a video game designed to familiarize Army recruits with the desert roads, derelict apartment blocks, and abandoned fruit markets that are apparently typical of the Middle Eastern landscape. For most people, the concealed threats—an explosive device hidden behind an oil drum; the shadow of a sniper's rifle protruding over a rooftop—can be identified only with training and practice. At the beginning of the study, subjects' brains were scanned by fMRI while they received training, to show which regions were active during learning. These areas were then targeted by electrodes in a new group of subjects as they performed the same task. Half of them received active tDCS; the other half, the control group, received "sham tDCS"—a negligibly low dose.

To Clark's disbelief, the subjects who received tDCS learned the same material twice as quickly as the control group. The study was replicated by other labs, with similar results. The Air Force found that tDCS made airmen twice as accurate at identifying tanks and missile launchers in radar scans.

"It's a huge, huge effect," Eric Claus, a neuroscientist at the Mind Research Network, told me of the original results. "As cognitive neuroscientists, we rarely see effects that large."

On hearing of Clark's findings, Claus decided to incorporate tDCS into his own work: the treatment of alcoholism using cognitive exercises. He is currently replicating a study in which alcoholics were found to drink less after repeatedly using a joystick to push away images of beverages. Claus scans the brains of alcoholics while they perform the joystick task; he then uses tDCS to stimulate the active regions on a new group of alcoholics. Two members of the tDCS group have gone from drinking a fifth of liquor a day to not drinking at all.

Few claims about tDCS are free from controversy. In the past few months, Jared Horvath, a fourth-year doctoral



student at the University of Melbourne, published two meta-analyses of hundreds of studies, in which he claims to have found no evidence of either physiological changes to the brain or of cognitive effects from tDCS. In aggregate, Horvath says, the claims of different researchers tend to "cancel each other out." For instance, four studies looked at whether tDCS increased glucose metabolism in the brain: two found that it did; two found that it didn't. "It's incredibly difficult to differentiate these effects from random chance," Horvath told me.

Horvath spent his first two years of graduate school trying unsuccessfully to get meaningful results from tDCS. "It didn't matter what device I used, what paradigm I used—I just never found anything," he said. The original purpose of his meta-analyses was simply to identify a reliable tDCS effect to use as a dissertation topic. Though skeptical, Horvath isn't saying that research should be abandoned. Rather, he argues that the focus must shift from documenting various individual effects to establishing the reliability of a baseline effect through large randomized studies with standardized protocols—a view shared by most researchers.

n my second day in Albuquerque, I met with three of Clark's researchers to try tDCS again, with a cognitive task. This time, the current would stimulate "location F4," an area of the scalp that lies over a part of the brain associated with working memory. Two students measured my head with a tape measure and fed the information into a software program, which told them how to find F4 relative to my ears. As they were annotating my head with colored stickers, I noticed a white ceramic phrenological bust standing on the desk. Its face wore a vacant yet weary expression, and its cranium was mapped with what phrenologists had considered to be the most basic human propensities: Wonder, Parental Love, Calculation, Secretiveness. I tried to gauge the place corresponding to F4, on the top right part of the head. It seemed to be near Sublimity, or Hope.

There was some trouble getting the gel-saturated sponge electrode to stay put on my hair. The students wrapped

COVERS BAND IN A SMALL BAR

They make it feel like yesterday, Which is the whole idea: another dateless Saturday in the basement of Charter Club, Drinking beer and listening to a Trenton covers band Play Four Tops songs: "Sugar Pie Honey Bunch," "It's the Same Old Song." They occupied my mind In 1966 through dinner with Robbie at Del Pezzo, later In the Vassar Club and on a cruise around Manhattan For Peter Mahony's parents' wedding anniversary. My tastes "evolved": more Stax, less Motown, Then the Velvet Underground and I.Q. rock-God, I was a snob. And now Lou Reed is dead And I'm sitting in the Art Bar in Milwaukee, Long past my usual bedtime—I don't stay out late, Don't care to go / I'm home about eight, just me And my radio—listening to my favorite songs again, Hearing them as though for the first time? Not at all: They're too familiar, I'm too preoccupied with them, Even though the flesh is still willing—swaying Slightly at the table, nodding up and down To the memory of "Pale Blue Eyes."

—John Koethe

a band of elastic netting around my head, and I held it in place with one hand. Throughout the study, I could feel the band oozily creeping up the back of my skull, like an ill-fitting graduation cap.

With the current off, I took two memory-related tests. In the first, the n-back test, a series of letters flashed on a screen, and I was told to decide whether each letter was the same one that flashed three letters ago. Next was a "progressive matrices" test, which involved choosing a visual pattern that matched a matrix of other patterns. After I had completed the tests, both of which I found difficult and annoying, the students turned on the tDCS. I felt a burning on F4 as the current ramped up. (A burning or tingling sensation or a metallic taste in the mouth is a common side effect, though some people don't feel anything at all.) I took the n-back test a second time. It was slightly less annoying and seemed to go by a bit faster. Then they turned the current off, and I took the matrices test again. It seemed a little bit easier than the first time, and I felt more peaceful, but, perhaps as a result of the peaceful feeling, I ran out of time and was unable to answer two questions.

Afterward, I learned the point of the study. Previously the experimenters had found that tDCS improved performance on the n-back test. Now they were trying to determine whether the benefit was "transferrable" to a different memory-related test once the current was switched off. In my case, the answer was no: I got exactly the same score—three out of nine—both times. The students didn't seem that surprised. They hadn't been getting great results. "You shouldn't feel bad," one of them said, handing me a tissue to wipe the gel off my hair. "Some people don't get any of them right."

The next morning, I returned to the psychology department to try tDCS a third time. I met with Katie Witkiewitz, a U.N.M. psychologist, who recently began incorporating tDCS into her work on addiction, meditation, and mindfulness. In earlier studies, Witkiewitz and her colleagues found Vipassana, a Buddhist meditation practice, to be more effective at preventing drug relapse than either cognitive behavioral therapy or twelve-step programs. She is now

embarking on research to determine if tDCS can make a meditative state deeper, easier to achieve, and longer-lasting—an attractive prospect for those who, like me, find meditation too boring and frustrating to practice with any regularity.

Witkiewitz put an anode over my right temple. In a trancelike tone, she instructed me to think about my breath, to imagine a balloon slowly filling in the empty space behind my eyes, to focus all my attention on the area directly above my head. She told me to watch my thoughts come and go. In previous attempts at meditation, I had always found this the hardest instruction to follow. My feeling was that either I was thinking my thoughts or I wasn't. If I was thinking them, I wasn't watching them. If I was watching them, I wasn't thinking them.

This time, I noticed that I thought, If there were really a balloon in my head, you, neuroscientist, would be out of a job. And then, as instructed, I let the thought drift away. Although there is no

quantitative test to measure the depth of a meditative state, I felt that my thoughts were, for a few hours afterward, calmer, more manageable, more countable—like a few sheep standing in a pasture instead of some demented sheep convention. My mind felt quieter, as if an inner voice had gone silent—the voice that usually says, "This is stupid, it's a waste of time, why isn't it over?"

Some tDCS studies have involved "quieting" a part of the brain by inhibiting neural activity. An Australian group, writing in Scientific American, claims that using tDCS to inhibit left-hemisphere brain activity improves performance on certain logic problems. The authors were inspired by the "savant skills" that sometimes accompany brain damage—as in the case of a boy who, having been shot in the head, lost the ability to read and write but became able "to dismantle and reassemble multigear bicycles without instruction," raising the possibility that extraordinary skills may be "latent in us all."

The authors' study of special skills displayed by patients with autism and brain damage hints at one area of concern regarding tDCS: with brain function, as with most things, you rarely get something for nothing. As Roi Cohen Kadosh, a neuroscientist at Oxford University, puts it, "Enhancing one cognitive ability can happen at the expense of another ability." Cohen Kadosh, the editor of a textbook called "The Stimulated Brain," has found that applying tDCS to one part of the brain helped subjects learn a math-related task but impeded their ability to recall what they had learned.

Heidi Schambra, a Columbia University neurologist who uses tDCS in her research with stroke patients, cautions against the view of tDCS as "a 'thinking cap' where you just put it on and everything becomes easier." Some stroke patients recover motor function more quickly when tDCS is administered during physical therapy—but without physical therapy tDCS doesn't seem



to have any effect, and even with the therapy the effects aren't huge. "We're not seeing a tripling or quadrupling," Schambra said. "It's a few points of statistical difference."

The human drive to zap one's head with electricity goes back at least to antiquity, and was originally satisfied by means of electric fish. "Headache even if it is chronic and unbearable is taken away and remedied forever by a live torpedo placed under the spot that is in pain," the first-century physician Scribonius Largus wrote. He also used the torpedo, a species of ray native to the Mediterranean, to treat hemorrhoids. In the eleventh century, the Islamic polymath Avicenna reportedly recommended the placement of an electric catfish on the brow to counteract epilepsy. As late as 1762, a Dutch colonist in Guyana wrote that "when a slave complains of a bad headache" he should put one hand on his head and another on a South American electric eel and "will be helped immediately, without exception."

The invention, in 1745, of the Leyden jar—a device to store static electricity-enabled many new experiments in electrotherapy, not all of them deliberate. In 1783, Jan Ingenhousz, a Dutch scientist, accidentally picked up a charged Leyden jar, causing an explosion that made him temporarily lose his memory, judgment, and ability to read and write. Having found his way home with great difficulty, he went to sleep. He woke to find that his mental faculties had not only returned but had sharpened: "I saw much clearer the difficulties of every thing," he wrote in a letter to Benjamin Franklin. "What did formerly seem to me difficult to comprehend, was now become of an easy solution."

Around the same time, Luigi Galvani's experiments with electricity and dead frogs led to the discovery of bioelectrical impulses. Galvani's nephew Giovanni Aldini was the first to apply galvanic current to humans; in this way he seemingly reanimated the corpses of beheaded felons. One such demonstration, at London's Royal College of Surgeons, may have inspired Mary Shelley's invention of Frankenstein's monster.

Electrotherapy on living people gained popularity in the nineteenth century. By 1850, European and American asylums

used galvanization to treat hysteria, menstrual pain, depression, and psychosis. Machines for electrotherapy were sold in London department stores and leased at seaside resorts. An 1871 electrotherapy textbook outlines treatments for hundreds of conditions, such as alcoholism, paralysis, dyspepsia, mutism, and "neur-



asthenia"—a form of nervous exhaustion that later came to be known as Americanitis. Many of the case histories in the book involve a procedure that sounds much like tDCS: direct current is applied by sponge electrodes, with a common side effect of "intense redness and an acute burning sensation." After such "galvanization," patients often "find that they can read with closer attention and with greater zest; that they can pursue connected thought without fatigue, and endure mental toil and anxiety that was once intolerable."

In the twentieth century, electrotherapy gradually fell from favor. Freud, who studied it with the neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot in Paris, abandoned it in favor of the "talking cure," after returning to Vienna. During the First World War, electricity was used to treat paralysis, epilepsy, and shell shock, often with disastrous results. In Louis-Ferdinand Céline's "Journey to the End of the Night" (1932), the hero receives a diagnosis of low patriotism and is sent to a military psychiatric hospital, where, he recalls, "they pumped us full of shocks." Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), which uses a far higher current than tDCS to trigger a full-brain seizure, gained in popularity by the nineteen-forties, but was generally considered a last resort for only the most serious cases. After the Second World War, interest shifted to antidepressants and other psychotropic drugs.

The decline of electrotherapy coincided with the rise of brain imaging. The first milestone was the invention, in 1924, of the electroencephalograph (EEG) by

Hans Berger, an enigmatic figure who may later have coöperated with the Nazi government, and who hanged himself in 1941. The EEG, which measures electrical discharge from the brain, was the first in a series of technologies to show that the brain physically changes depending on what we do, think, and feel, and that the brains of the mentally ill function differently from those of the healthy.

Berger's innovation had its roots in his interest in psychic phenomena. As a young man in the Prussian Army, Berger once fell off a horse and was almost run over by an artillery gun. The previous night, his sister, to whom he was very close, had dreamed that he fell off a horse and broke his leg. The sister was so alarmed by the dream that she had their father send Berger a telegram; it reached Berger immediately after his accident. Berger was convinced that his brain had sent electrical signals to his sister. And he was right, almost: the brain does generate electrical impulses, and they change depending on your mental state. Though too weak to travel through the air, they may be recorded by electrodes placed on the scalp. Your brain can't tell your faraway sister that you're about to fall off a horse, but it can tell an EEG machine that you're frightened or having a seizure or asleep.

The resurgence of interest in electrical brain stimulation began in 2000, after scientists in Göttingen proved that low-current "galvanization," the procedure now known as tDCS, could change brain function. This discovery coincided with a wave of interest in neuroplasticity—the brain's capacity for change—and with the rise of increasingly sophisticated imaging tools, like fMRI. The number of tDCS studies has risen steadily since 2000, with more than four hundred studies published last year.

Perhaps the most dramatic clinical use of tDCS has been in the treatment of auditory hallucinations. In Albuquerque, Clark introduced me to Jaime Campbell, a forty-year-old woman who has been hearing voices since she was fifteen, and who recently participated in a study at U.N.M. Heavyset, with a placid and cheerful demeanor, she was carrying a crochet project in a tote bag labelled "Bible

Bag."The first voice she had ever heard, she said, was the voice of God. She had been sitting at a computer table at the time, and God said she would go to South Africa and die a martyr. At sixteen, Campbell began to be followed by the man she called "the chaperon." He walked six feet behind her, and would rape and kill her if she did anything wrong. "I didn't cuss. I didn't lie. I didn't cheat. I didn't even say the word 'sex,'" Campbell recalled. "I was a very well-behaved teen."

At nineteen, Campbell was given a diagnosis of schizophrenia. People asked her then why she had never mentioned the chaperon. "Because it was normal," she said. "Every sixteen-year-old has a chaperon."

An estimated seventy-five per cent of schizophrenics hear voices, and twenty-five to thirty per cent of those cases don't respond to medication. The majority of the voices are nasty, telling subjects that they are worthless or should commit suicide. Campbell told me that her voices

all belong to men, with the exception of one "non-gendered voice" that used to talk about her in the third person. "She's stupid," it would say. "No, she's not stupid—she's ugly. She's not ugly—she hates people. She doesn't hate people—they hate her." Once, the voices said that anyone she spoke to would explode. She didn't speak a word for three days and nights, to keep everyone safe.

Campbell's other symptoms have included visual hallucinations and delusions of persecution. Once, she saw four demons—red misshapen creatures with tails—hanging up near the ceiling in the four corners of the room, watching her. Campbell was raised in a nondenominational charismatic church, and religion is still extremely important to her. She believes that she's more in touch with the spiritual world than most people and that the visions and voices come to her from God. But she also believes that her mind "twists things," that it causes her suffering beyond what's ordinary or bearable.

For the past twenty years, Campbell has been in treatment with medications and with ECT, which helped with her depression but didn't silence the voices. Last summer, she began an experimental treatment offered by Clark and Robert Thoma, a U.N.M. psychologist who specializes in schizophrenia. The trial is based on a randomized study done in France in 2012, in which thirty schizophrenics were given tDCS for five days. The treatment decreased auditory hallucinations by thirty-one per cent, and the benefits lasted, and in some cases grew, over the next three months.

Campbell received two twenty-minute tDCS sessions a day for five days. After the very first session, she felt a reduction in the "tea party": an ambient murmuring and clinking that she always heard in the background. Gradually, particular voices went mute. By midweek, Campbell says, her head was completely quiet.

"I never had a response like tDCS,"



Campbell says. "Even with the ECT, even with the best medication combinations that we've come up with, I've never had something that does as complete a job." Unlike ECT, which lost effectiveness over repeated treatments, tDCS seemed to help more and more, even after the study had ended. For weeks, Campbell didn't hear any voices at all. Everything became easier: thinking, grocery shopping, driving a car. The most revolutionary thing, she says, was "to not have someone constantly telling me that I'm a horrible person." People used to tell her that she was a good person, but she never believed them, because the voices said the opposite—and didn't they know her best? When they finally shut up, she said that she felt like a woman who had been rescued from an abusive husband.

Clark and Thoma will eventually replicate the randomized controls of the French experiment, but so far Campbell is one of only two people to have completed the study, and the fluctuating nature of schizophrenia symptoms makes it dangerous to infer too much from her experience. When I met her, four months had passed since her last tDCS session. The voices had started to return, though only sporadically. Over the weekend, she had heard a voice at Walmart telling her she was a bad person and that people were going to blow her up. But when she left Walmart the voice went quiet. She still

feels better than she did before the study. But every time she hears a voice she feels terrified that "they're going to come back full-fledged."

B efore tDCS can be approved by the F.D.A. and enter widespread use, there have to be large randomized controlled trials. Protocols must be standardized—the placement of the electrodes, the amount of current, and the duration, frequency, and number of sessions. In the meantime, there is a device called ActivaDose, which has been cleared by the F.D.A. for another purpose (administering drugs transdermally), and which can also administer tDCS; physicians may legally prescribe it "off label," which is how some hospitals can offer the therapy. Several Internet companies sell tDCS kits for nonmedical uses, such as boosting cognition or enhancing video-game performance. There is a tDCS subreddit, a do-it-yourself tDCS blog and podcast, and a certain amount of YouTube footage showing young men with little scientific background zapping their brains in the hope of learning German or playing better chess.

It is the rare human who doesn't wish to change something about his or her brain. In my case, it's depression, which runs on both sides of my family. I've been taking antidepressants for almost twenty years, and they help a lot. But every couple of years the effects wear off, and I have to either up the dose or

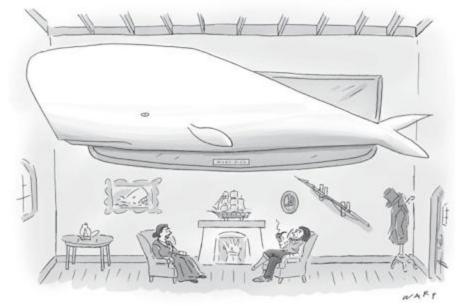
switch to a different drug—neither process can be repeated indefinitely without the risk of liver or kidney damage. So although my symptoms are under control for now, I worry, depressively, about what will happen when I exhaust the meds. As I was researching this piece, my attention was caught by a number of randomized controlled trials showing a benefit from tDCS for depression. (The data are insufficient to allow definitive conclusions, but larger trials are in progress.) I was almost embarrassed by how excited I felt. What if it was possible to feel less sad—to escape the deterministic cycle of sadness? What if you could do the treatment yourself, at home, without the humiliation and expense of doctors' visits? I asked Vince Clark whether any private physicians use tDCS outside of a research setting.

He knew of only one: James Fugedy, a Yale-trained anesthesiologist who practices in Atlanta. I spoke with Fugedy on the phone and learned that, since 2007, he has treated between three hundred and four hundred patients with tDCS, principally for chronic pain and depression. Most of his patients self-administer tDCS at home: Fugedy charges twenty-six hundred dollars for a package including the device, a diagnostic and training session, and follow-up consultations in person or over Skype.

Early this year, I took a plane to Atlanta. Fugedy's practice is in a medical park about half an hour from the airport. The sign on the suite door—"Brain Stimulation Clinic"—seemed to suggest a large staff, but the only people there were Fugedy and a dreadlocked office manager in scrubs.

Fugedy, a sixty-five-year-old New Jersey transplant, combines a soft-spoken demeanor with boundless energy. He told me that he first learned about tDCS from a 2006 study on fibromyalgia, published by scientists at Harvard. He mentioned the paper to a patient, saying he hoped that the F.D.A. would approve the technology soon. "I'm old," she replied. "Why can't we do it now?"

Fugedy practiced tDCS a few times on himself and then began to treat his fibromyalgia patient. After five sessions, she experienced a greater reduction in pain than she had on any other treatment. Fugedy went on to use the tDCS with other chronic-pain patients. In



"Нарру?"

2008, he got a call from a chronically depressed electrical engineer in southern Georgia. His doctor had prescribed ECT, but he was worried about possible memory loss; he had heard of tDCS, and wanted to try it first. Fugedy agreed, and the engineer began commuting to Atlanta five days a week. After four weeks, his mood had improved, and he stopped the treatment. Three months later, when the symptoms returned, Fugedy got him his own stimulator and showed him how to use it.

Fugedy's recent patients include a bipolar pregnant woman who couldn't take her medications during pregnancy and a thirty-year-old schizophrenic man who had been unable to tolerate antipsychotics. After starting tDCS, Fugedy told me, the man was able to get his first job and enroll in college. Fugedy, who has had depressive episodes himself, has been self-administering tDCS on and off for eight years.

After we had been talking for an hour or two, Fugedy handed me a black plas-

tic case about the size of a desk dictionary. Inside were two electrodes with cables and sponges, a nine-volt battery, a Velcro headband, and an ActivaDose. He showed me how to wet the sponges, fit them into the frames, and connect the electrodes to the stimulator.

Fugedy thinks that the electrodes move around less if you lie down, so I lay on the examination table and slipped the electrodes underneath the Velcro headband. The anode went just over my left eye, to stimulate the left dorsolateral prefrontal cortex—a part of the brain that may be underactive in depressed people—and the cathode over the visual cortex, on the back of my head. Then I set the timer for twenty minutes and the current to two milliamps, and turned the dial to start the flow of electricity. As the current ramped up, I felt the familiar burning on my forehead and general wordlessness.

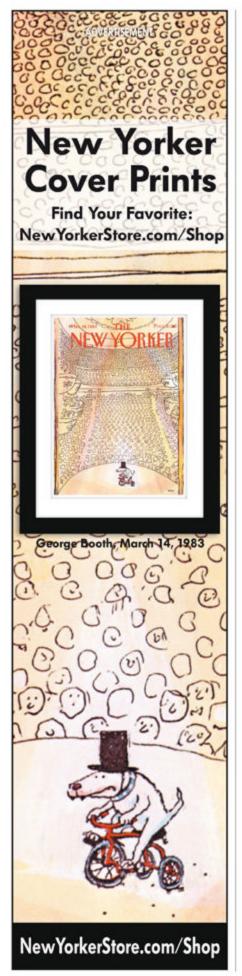
For a short time, Fugedy kept up his end of a conversation we had been having about neuroimaging. "Well, I'll just

leave you in peace," he concluded eventually, handing me a brass handbell and leaving the room.

Sun shone in a halo around the corner of the window blinds. On the wall hung a picture of a woman cradling a naked infant; a pair of white wings sprouted from the child's tiny shoulders. A cursive caption read "Hope Cherishing Love." I felt obscurely troubled by the caption. Wasn't it love that cherished hope, rather than the other way round? Wasn't hope the thing with feathers? The longer I thought about it, the more the words resisted understanding and shifted places, again and again, like markers on a game board. My thoughts turned to the many patients who must have lain on this same white table and held this same brass bell, and how appropriate the image of hope was, because surely nobody would be here if he hadn't tried a lot of other things first.

I felt peaceful in the cab back to the airport. The T.S.A. didn't try to confiscate





the nine-volt battery. On the plane, I was seated beside a small girl who was playing a game called Office Jerk on her iPad. The game involved throwing a stapler at the head of an office worker. "Who's the jerk, him or you?" the girl's mother asked. I wondered if I should offer to improve the girl's performance with a little stimulation to the right inferior frontal cortex, but she didn't appear to need it.

The next day, I tried tDCS at home. I felt some burning again and tightened the strap; Fugedy had said this might improve the electrode connection. It's possible that I overdid it with the tightening, because at the end of twenty minutes I had a pink electrode-shaped square on my forehead. In the shower afterward, I felt my forehead sting under the hot water, as if sunburned. A headache that had come on at some point during Office Jerk was now insistently throbbing behind my left eyebrow. Yet, whether because of the tDCS or for some other reason, I was in excellent spirits the rest of the day, and indeed all week. (The pink square went away within minutes; the headache lingered for days.) The fact that I might have suffered a mild burn on my forehead because of a brain-zapping machine I had bought in Atlanta seemed hilarious. It was a new year, fresh snow had fallen, the holidays were finally over. New York looked beautiful.

My plan to try tDCS for two weeks, to see if it made a difference in my depression, fell through for an unexpected reason: I didn't feel depressed enough. It was a reminder, if I needed one, of how difficult it is to extract scientific facts from human experience. Even when you isolate one variable and test it in a lab with control subjects, it's difficult to know why you're seeing what you see; and in the messiness of everyday life, where there are any number of reasons that your mood might change from one week to the next, it's virtually impossible to gauge the effects of applying subthreshold electricity to your own head.

One of the mysteries of tDCS is why some uses require a cognitive task and others don't. The therapy makes people better at math only if it's paired with a math task. But it seems to make depressed people feel better even if they're just sitting there. Heidi Schambra, the neurologist who works with stroke patients, has a fascinating theory about this. She believes that, at the moment of receiving tDCS, a person in emotional or physical pain is engaged, wittingly or unwittingly, in a cognitive task: namely, the activation of the placebo response.

We're not used to viewing placebo—a positive response to a sham treatment—as a "task," but there are many cognitive factors involved, including Pavlovian conditioning, the patient-clinician relationship, and positive expectation. Deception, Schambra points out, may not be required: sugar pills have been shown to reduce the symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome, even in patients who were explicitly told that they were receiving a placebo.

The implication of placebo is extremely powerful: What if the body knows, in some sense, how to heal itself, and it's just a matter of triggering that knowledge? Schambra suspects tDCS may not merely trigger the placebo effect, as all treatments do, but actually amplify it. In other words, in a controlled tDCS study, both active and sham groups get a placebo effect, but the active group may get a bigger effect. Schambra emphasizes that her theory is just speculation for now. She got the idea from a study that found expectancy to be an important factor in how well people responded to depression treatment: the patients who felt better were the ones who expected to feel better—not necessarily the ones who got the active versus the placebo

After we hung up, I found myself thinking about what neurologists call "positive expectancy" and what the phrenologists called hope. The phrenologists already knew that hope was situated in the prefrontal cortex: "in front of conscientiousness, and behind marvelousness, being elongated in the direction of the ears." Phrenologists were unable to detect hope in animals; in criminals, they said, it was diminished. Hope inspires and dupes us in turn, eternally promising happiness in this world and the next. In a lecture on phrenology, the French physician Broussais once produced a partial mold of Napoleon's head. You couldn't see everything, he said. But you could see enough of the organ of hope to conclude that it was very well developed. ◆

COUPLE'S FIRST DINNER PARTY, SERVES SIX

BY HALLIE CANTOR



INGREDIENTS

1 eager young hostess who wants to prove to her friends that she and her new boyfriend are a serious couple by having a dinner party

1 half of a couple who is always running late

1 couple who are constantly breaking up and getting back together

1 single friend

DIRECTIONS

In a small kitchen, mix together the half of the guests who have arrived on time despite the fact that no one is sure whether "7:30" means "arrive at 7:30" or "arrive an hour late," like it did in college. Let stand for one hour, until guests are very hungry and slightly irritable.

Slowly incorporate the remainder of the guests, pausing after the addition of each one for the same grating conversation about how easy or hard it was to find the host's apartment from the subway and what an up-and-coming neighborhood this is. Gently fold the host's new boyfriend into a discussion about people whom everyone else in attendance used to work with and whom he's never met.

At this point, the on-again, off-again couple should be stewing, having re-

vealed themselves to be off-again through a tense disagreement about which one is responsible for their lateness. Separate the couple and set aside to chill.

Meanwhile, allow the single guest to marinate in her insecurity about being the only unattached person there.

When all the guests have arrived, whisk the conversation about the neighborhood into a frothy lament of gentrification. Skim over the fact that the party's attendees all live in condos built in the past year.

Add wine.

Heap a large quantity of praise on the host's cooking. When she worries aloud that the chicken isn't fully cooked, vigorously massage her ego by reassuring her that it is. (You may have to repeat this step more times than you think are necessary.)

Let the guy whose girlfriend is still running late mince his words while pontificating on a relatively esoteric current-events issue. Listen until it becomes clear that he made it through only one relevant "longread" on his lunch hour. Grill him about specifics until he is unable to clarify his point and is rendered speechless. Meanwhile, sprinkle each couple's speech with "we" statements, adding a subtle

flavor of competition to the mélange.

Each guest should, at some point, look around and offer a lukewarm comment about how "grownup" it is to be having a dinner party. Congratulate one another on the genius of "just hanging out with friends without having to go to a noisy expensive bar," as though you've personally invented the concept of home entertaining. Garnish with more compliments about the chicken, which there is nowhere near enough of.

Next, embroil the guests in a "theoretical" discussion of the merits of non-monogamous relationships. Adding more wine every few minutes, reduce to a simmering fight between the on-again, off-again couple about "what constitutes human nature."

Before long, the couple's words will begin to turn dark and brittle. Be sure not to crowd them, so that bystanders don't get burned.

Lighten the mood by allowing the single guest to offer a terrible story about her dating life. Let everyone else steep in pity for this person, before deglazing.

Blend several imperceptibly different opinions on an issue that everyone in attendance basically agrees upon. By this point, wine will have loosened up the guests enough for one of them to say something stupid in an attempt to be provocative. Expose him to the low flame of the other guests' judgment until he begins to turn slightly pink. Then let him blanch as he frantically defends his stupid position further, insisting that he's only "playing devil's advocate."

Bring the argument to a boil, then remove the devil's advocate from the heat by letting him storm out to "have a cigarette." The remaining mixture of guests should bubble into nervous laughter. After several minutes of uncomfortable silence, you should begin to hear sighing, yawning, and perfunctory offers to help with the dishes.

Once each couple has been sifted out of the apartment, they will cool off by affectionately bad-mouthing the other guests on the train ride home.

Yields one large headache and the desire to abstain from socializing for several weeks. ◆

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

THE NERD HUNTER

The casting director Allison Jones is reshaping American comedy, one misfit at a time.

BY STEPHEN RODRICK

The first scene of "Other Space," a new sci-fi sitcom by Paul Feig, which streams on Yahoo on April 14th, begins with one of the show's central characters, a hapless spaceship captain named Stewart Lipinski, navigating the ship through an asteroid shower while eating a hot dog. On a Saturday last August, however, on the first day of cast-

Angeles. The rooms of the house are airy and filled with mementos of her thirty-year-long career in Hollywood: bobble-heads of characters from "The Office," which Jones cast; a bulletin board collaged with head shots. In the waiting room, next to the sign-in sheet, a bowl of candies and bubble gum greets nervous actors. The audition room is

brought in a real one, which suggested to Jones that they were trying a little too hard. Early in the day, a young man came in wearing suspenders over a Stanford T-shirt and with military ribbons taped to his chest. When he pulled a banana out of his pocket, Jones quietly sighed. A few moments later, it popped out of its peel and landed at Jones's feet. This was nothing, she later told me; once, during an emotional table read, an actress accidentally punched her in the face.

In the early days of Hollywood, casting directors had little decision-making power. Most working actors were signed to individual studios, and casting mainly involved matching individuals to roles based on the actor's availability and type.



"Allison doesn't just find us actors; she finds us people we want to work with the rest of our lives," the director Judd Apatow said.

ing, the script was in flux and the hot dog was still written as a banana. Allison Jones, the casting director, was reading the scene with actors trying out for the Stewart role, who faced a decision: audition with a real banana, or just pretend to eat one?

Jones works out of a bungalow in the quaint Larchmont neighborhood of Los

austere, with no windows and just two chairs. Jones hates asking her staff to work on weekends—"They don't make enough money," she said—so she was alone, with a video camera mounted on a tripod, reading lines as one aspiring Stewart after another passed through, four minutes apart. Most of the actors pretended to eat a banana, but some had

In the nineteen-sixties, as the studio system broke down, the influence of casting directors grew. Heavyweights like Marion Dougherty discovered young talent on Broadway and persuaded directors to hire such unknowns as Al Pacino, Paul Newman, and Robert Duvall. Jones began her career with the two-beats-and-a-punch-line sitcoms of

the nineteen-eighties, but, in working with Feig and the director Judd Apatow, she was required to try something revolutionary: find comedic actors who, more than just delivering jokes, could improvise and riff on their lines, creating something altogether different from what was on the page.

In the process, Jones has helped give rise to a new kind of American comedy. In 1999, she cast Seth Rogen, James Franco, and Jason Segel in the critically acclaimed, poorly watched teen series "Freaks and Geeks." The show, created and written by Feig and produced by Apatow, was a coming-of-age story set in the suburban Michigan of Feig's youth. Jones won the show's only Emmy, for her casting. Several years later, she met with a young, sweaty Jonah Hill, who was desperate for an introduction to Apatow. She told Apatow that Hill was weird and hilarious. That sufficed; Apatow expanded a cameo part for Hill in "The 40-Year-Old Virgin," as an odd but lovable eBay customer. Two years later, Hill was cast with Michael Cera in "Superbad," a raunchy teen comedy that Apatow produced. It was left to Jones to find their nerdier-than-thou friend McLovin. Jones posted notices seeking high-school students in L.A. After seeing thousands of candidates, she caught a glimpse of a camera-phone head shot sent in by a sixteen-year-old named Christopher Mintz-Plasse. She called the director, Greg Mottola, and excitedly said, "I think I found McLovin; he's like Dill from 'To Kill a Mockingbird." Jones told me, "You could tell he was a kid who probably had seen the inside of a locker." Since then, Mintz-Plasse has starred in six movies.

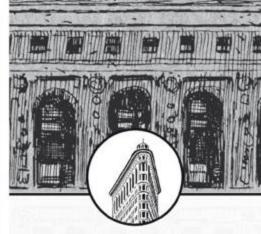
"Allison doesn't just find us actors; she finds us people we want to work with the rest of our lives," Apatow said. "That's good, because the older you get you don't want to see tons of people. I know if Allison sends two they will both be great." Feig said, "Years from now, she will be recognized as having changed the face of comedy as much as any comedy filmmaker. All the best comedy people have come through her or from her." Jones did the casting for Apatow's 2007 film, "Knocked Up," and for Feig's 2011 comedy, "Bridesmaids." This summer, Feig will direct a remake of "Ghostbusters," with all-female stars and a supporting cast assembled by Jones; already it's the most highly anticipated comedy of 2016.

Jones is in her fifties, and nearly six feet tall, with unruly curly hair. In jeans and blouses from Liberty, she comes across as someone's favorite aunt. She met Feig more than twenty-five years ago, when he was a struggling actor, and their professional relationship deepened through their collaboration on "Freaks and Geeks." In 2013, Feig reacquired "Other Space" from Twentieth Century Fox Television, where it had been stuck for years. Feig once described the show in the *Times* as a sci-fi version of "The Office." The lead character, Stewart Lipinski, is a dorky twentysomething space commander. He is assisted by Karen, his sister, and Michael, his best friend, both of whom are miffed at having been passed over for the position. The other crew members are Kent, a wealthy humanoid who has wakened from a chemical bath; Tina, Stewart's ditzy love interest; and Natasha, a Spock-like virtual sexbot and the ship's operating system, who appears on a computer screen.

By the time Jones finishes reading a script, she already has ideas about which actors might be right for the roles—and who can handle the pressure of constantly improvising during the eightyhour workweek that shooting a television comedy often requires. But she also likes the surprise of the unknown, and on the first day of casting she was wading through fifty or so candidates chosen from some nine thousand who had appealed to her in online head shots. She was looking in particular for "Paul Feig types," well-meaning nerds who are endearing in their benevolent oddness. "She finds people that your heart can break for," the actor Paul Rudd told me. By lunchtime, however, Jones hadn't seen anyone worth showing to Feig. "They're forcing it," she said. "It's not real. You're either a nerd or you're not."

Between auditions, to lift her spirits, Jones watched an old "Saturday Night Live" sketch of Will Ferrell spoofing James Lipton. At one point, she whispered, "I'm going to hit the ladies' room and blow my brains out." But she caught a glimpse of someone interesting in the waiting room, and when she came back her eyes were alight.

"Wait till you see the next guy! He's



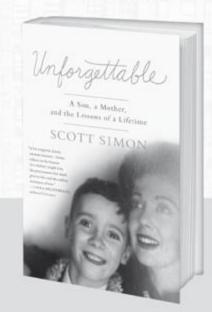
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'Ms. Hillenbrand's comment was made after she listened to an audio recording of the work. a real goober. He's the real thing. I just hope he can talk."

Nick Azarian was a mountain of hair nesting on a tiny, teen-age face. He carried a binder and wore a turtleneck with a space-camp sticker. As he walked in, a wide smile broke across Jones's face. According to his IMDb résumé, Azarian, who is from Charlotte, was a "full-out power geek." He told Jones that he'd found the shirt at Goodwill and printed the sticker himself.

"God bless you!" Jones said.

Azarian read the part. When his four minutes were up, he left the room but then returned, blushing—he'd forgotten his binder. He wasn't right for the lead, but he had jolted Jones awake.

"See? That's the face we're looking for," she said. "A real face. You can't fake that face. I'll show him to Paul; he'll find something for him." She sighed dreamily. "That face!"

"I don't know why I'm drawn to nerds," Jones told me recently over a burger at the Astro Burger, a restaurant near her office. Her face brightened and she pushed her glasses up on her nose. She admitted that on Valentine's Day she had stayed up till 3 A.M. watching the Weather Channel, mesmerized by Jim Cantore's dancing reaction to thundersnow. "I mean, why am I obsessed with the people on the Weather Channel? Because they're so pure, nice, and nerdy. There's nothing cynical about them."

For Jones, the definition of "nerd" is broad enough to include every Jack Lemmon role, Elaine May in her 1971 film "A New Leaf," and Cecil Vyse, the benign but misguided character played by Daniel Day-Lewis in the Merchant Ivory adaptation of "A Room with a View."

The category might also include Jones. When I told Apatow that I was writing about her, he asked, "What does she do outside of work? What are her hobbies? Please tell me, because I don't know." Jones is single and enjoys sewing. Sometimes she visits nephews and nieces on the Eastern Seaboard. Mostly, she works. "I'm the person that people forget they met," she said. She lives in a modest house not far from her office, but she preferred not to show it. Instead, on the Saturday after the first day of casting, she offered a tour of her storage space, in Studio City. We drove there in her black Audi S.U.V. She opened a rattling, white sliding door to her space, revealing thirty years of boxes, files, and memorabilia.

Jones grew up in Needham, Massachusetts, outside Boston, the second youngest of six children. Her father, an executive at John Hancock, loved Walter Matthau and hated John F. Kennedy; her mother managed the kids. Growing up, Jones watched quietly as her parents and her older siblings battled over Vietnam and long hair. "I was the fifth of six kids," Jones

said. "I didn't want to make any adult pissed off. I'm still terrified of fucking up, because the business is a little bit of that same mentality—who do you blame for something that's a failure? Gotta blame casting."

Jones credits her brothers with shaping her comedic tastes. One brother and his friends made up stories called "Christmas Tragedies," for which they invented and recited straight-faced accounts of misery—Jones fondly recalled a bit in which a plane full of pregnant nuns crashes into an orphanage. "I admired so much how the boys could tell each other to fuck off without anyone getting mad," she said. "The girls I knew got so sensitive. My brothers were not prim and proper."

She enjoyed watching a "real but weird" local program called "Community Auditions," a low-budget precursor to "American Idol," in which amateurs would sing and perform, sometimes backed by a lumbering orchestra. Later, at Pomona College, in California, she and her friends watched the first episodes of "Saturday Night Live." She loved comedy, but it seemed impractical; she earned an M.B.A. at U.C.L.A. and endured a year at a New York advertising firm, working on the Stroh's beer account. She recalled a moment at business school when she froze just before she was due to give a presentation.

"I just couldn't do it," Jones told me. "I got massive stagefright and started shaking. The next presentation, I did it from a humorous point of view, and then I could do it."

Jones returned to California and enrolled in the producer program at the American Film Institute. One of her early assignments was to cast another student's adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's short story "The Potato Elf." She showed me a file containing head shots and film memos from the project. "I rejected Anjelica Huston," Jones said. "At that time, she was John Huston's daughter, Jack Nicholson's girlfriend, and a model. That was her claim to fame. Thirty years later, I still don't know what I'm doing." Jones confessed that she passed on Ryan Gosling for a pilot and chose not to bring Kristen Wiig back for a second audition for "The Office."

Her first significant job out of school was as a casting assistant on "Family



Ties." She soon realized the extent to which casting could make or break a show. There were spirited battles internally over whether Michael J. Fox was right for the role of the teen-age conservative Alex P. Keaton, with some executives arguing that he was too short and not charismatic enough. (Fox became the breakout star of the show.) In her downtime, she watched films and TV shows and, when the credits rolled, wrote down the names of promising comedians and actors. She showed me a tiny, tattered notebook that read, "Carson: 11/28/86 Ellen?" It was Ellen De-Generes's first appearance on the "Tonight Show." (The next line read, "Ordered two salads from Mr. Pizza.")

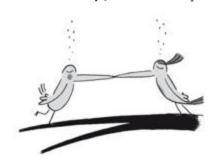
Jones found regular work on "Family Ties" and "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air," but she was also casting sitcom pilots. In one, a short-lived TV show called "Grand," she had to cast the role of "wolf boy," a teen-ager who was raised in the forest by wolves. The applicants included a young Leonardo DiCaprio. But Jones often chafed at working for the networks. One writer complained that Di-Caprio and the other kids "looked too well-fed." She brought in Jim Carrey for another project, but his mouth was deemed to be too big. Producers would insist that Jones call agents late at night and inform them that their client need not show up in the morning. She has had to fire Dane Cook and Pauly Shore. "Other Space" is part of Yahoo's first wave of original programming, and its budget is a sliver of what "Ghostbusters" will spend. But, for Jones, part of the appeal is that it's not a network show.

"The networks micromanage so much that it just makes me fucking berserk," she told me. "So I can't do it. I'm just cranky all the time, and I hate being that way."

In the nineteen-eighties, even smart comedies like "WKRP in Cincinnati" featured misfits who were nonetheless gorgeous. Through her casting, Jones has introduced actors who more closely resemble people in real life. She found Andy Buckley, Michael Scott's boss on "The Office," at a farmers' market in L.A., several years after Buckley had given up acting to become a stockbroker. The "Office" character Phyllis, a feisty, heavyset saleswoman, is played by

Phyllis Smith, who was not trained as an actor; for several years she had worked as Jones's casting associate. In 2013, Jones cast Joe Lo Truglio, a nebbish comedian, as a detective alongside Andy Samberg on the police comedy "Brooklyn Nine-Nine." Lo Truglio had auditioned for Jones dozens of times in the past two decades. "Brooklyn Nine-Nine" won a Golden Globe Award for best comedy series during its first season.

In Studio City, Jones was still open-



ing boxes and sifting through artifacts: green "Family Ties" coffee cups, a publicity photo of an adolescent Will Smith leaning between pillars, clippings from old TV Guides. I caught sight of a dusty spec script from the early nineteen-nineties that had the words "Seinfeld" and "Allison Jones" on it. I asked if she had written a script for "Seinfeld." Jones tried to change the subject, then claimed that she could remember only the subplot, which turned on the idea that in 1985 Kramer had been aboard the Achille Lauro when Palestinian terrorists seized the cruise ship. It was Kramer, not the terrorists, who (accidentally) pushed Leon Klinghoffer overboard.

Jeff Garlin, a principal actor on "Curb Your Enthusiasm" and a longtime friend of Jones's, later told me that he'd read the script. "It was hilarious," he said, and added that she was instrumental in helping him write his 2006 comedy, "I Want Someone to Eat Cheese With." "I always try to get her to write more. She is so talented."

Jones had shown the script to a couple of agents, one of whom told her, incorrectly, that she had misspelled "George Constanza." "They had some stupid comments and I got discouraged, like an idiot," she said. She once wrote spec scripts for "Family Ties" and "Murphy Brown," but those also went nowhere, and she is no longer writing. She put the "Seinfeld" script back into

a box and sealed it up. "I'm still really terrified, but not as afraid as I used to be."

The files she turned up from "Freaks and Geeks" had a Dead Sea Scrolls feel about them-modern comedy at Year One. The show's plot centered on three nerds and five burnouts; Apatow and Feig told Jones to find the kids that never get cast. Jones and her team saw hundreds of prospects in Los Angeles, New York, Vancouver, and Chicago. Feig and Apatow saw Rogen on tape and invited him to an open call in Vancouver, pegging him to play Ken, a sarcastic burnout. She spotted Segel, a handsome highschool basketball player, and cast him as Nick, a vulnerable drummer with a Rush obsession and a jackass dad. She remembered Franco from "1973," a failed pilot that she had cast that year, and slotted him as Daniel Desario, a handsome but insecure James Dean wannabe.

"When Jones found Jason, I didn't know what to do with him," Feig told me. "He wasn't what I was looking for. Judd said the beauty is we can rewrite to fit these great people that Allison's found."

In late 1998, at a Los Angeles casting call, Jones met the ultimate Feig type: a gangly, freckle-faced kid named Martin Starr. "When Martin walked in, I remember thinking, Please, please be able to talk," Jones said. He was cast as one of three freshman geeks trying to make it through the day without being humiliated. (He now stars on HBO's "Silicon Valley.") Later, Jones went on to cast Shia LaBeouf as a terrified school mascot and Lizzy Caplan as Segel's disco-loving girlfriend. She spent weeks trying to get a script to a teen-age Scarlett Johansson. A very young Shailene Woodley auditioned, and Jones scrawled "very talkative" next to her name. The cast didn't meet as a whole until the first table read, to go through the pilot script together. Feig, Apatow, and Jones saw the glimmers of a more realistic comedy, in which the laughs come from the human foibles of the nerds and burnouts who make up the cast. Feig has called it "pushed reality."

"It's a sensibility," he told me over breakfast one morning. "I don't want anybody ever doing things where they feel fake, because that's a kind of nineties style of comedy—'Look how funny I am!" He mentioned Dwight Schrute, the scheming but harmless salesman played by Rainn Wilson, on "The Office."

"Dwight's a really crazy character," Feig said. "But he so believes it, he's so grounded, and he's not winking at us. That's what makes you go, 'That's hilarious.' The key is finding people who have a natural governor. I can push them and push them and they won't go into cartoon land." Wilson was the first actor Jones saw when she was casting the show's pilot. "Everyone is obsessed with 'heat,' who's hot," Jeff Garlin said. "But Allison has never cared about who's hot, and she's never changed what she thought was funny."

Jones's collaboration with Apatow has given rise to a brand of "dude humor"—bumbling young guys who behave badly but have hearts of plated gold. "It's a little strange, since they're so much younger than me and talk so much about vaginas," Jones said at one point. In the past couple of years, critics of Apatow have suggested that his work is misogynistic. Jones said that it just reminded her of her older brothers. Still, she looked forward to casting "Ghostbusters."

"It's nice to get a break from the testosterone every once in a while," she said. "I was thrilled to do 'Bridesmaids'—it was a true ensemble of odd characters, all of whom I had observed in real life. There wasn't one scene that called for a push-up bra. Most female descriptions in screenplays and TV scripts—and I am not kidding—are basically 'astonishingly beautiful, even without makeup,' and 'brilliant.' Never just beautiful, always astonishingly so."

A few days after the first audition, Jones conducted another, for the part of Karen, Stewart's sister in "Other Space"; she set up her video camera while her assistant, Ben Harris, took a seat and prepared to read with the actresses.

As the film industry has turned digital, the technical process of editing has become far less painful, but it has created more work. Many of the directors who collaborate with Jones shoot exponentially more film than a comedy in the nineteen-nineties might have. (For "Knocked Up," Apatow shot the equivalent of more than a million feet of film,

four times more than Ron Shelton shot in making the 1988 classic "Bull Durham.") It has also made Jones's ability to find prodigies more important, since so much of the film's comedy emerges in post-production.

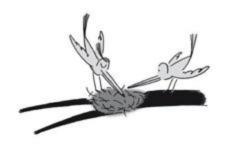
The Karen role was challenging: the character has been passed over for command in favor of Stewart, so she must be both crabby and funny. Jones had already seen half a dozen actresses when Milana Vayntrub sat down in the waiting room, wearing glasses and a prim plaid dress with a white collar. To break the tension in crowded audition rooms, Vayntrub told me, she likes to slurp water loudly from a cup, see who laughs, and befriend them. She was waiting alone for Jones, so she repeated a mantra from her acting coach: "I release and destroy my need to get this part. I am just here to tickle myself and play in these circumstances. This is not a scene; I am just going to behave as though it's really happening."

Vayntrub was born in Uzbekistan and grew up in a Russian enclave of West Hollywood. Jones first saw her in 2014, at an audition for the Billy Crystal sitcom "The Comedians."

"Milana Vayntrub, how are you?" Jones asked.

Vayntrub's face scrunched up; Robin Williams had died the day before. "I'm kinda shitty, kinda sad," she said.

"I know, it's just the most awful thing," Jones said. "Just awful."



That set Vayntrub at ease, she later told me: "I knew I could say that to her and that she was connected to me as a person and not just like a number." She stumbled early in Karen's monologue, when she tells Stewart that she feels that he's always upstaging her. But she found her rhythm, pointing out that Stewart even won the part of Juliet over her in drama club, then improvised: "You were beautiful. For the record, you looked really great in the Juliet corset. The painted-

on cleavage was a really nice touch."

Jones laughed along during Vayntrub's four minutes, nodding encouragingly. Jones paused for a moment before the next audition. "I love her so much," she said. "She has that energy." But she thought Vayntrub was better for the role of Tina, Stewart's love interest, and arranged for her to come back and read for that part.

The competition for Tina was already fierce. Earlier in the week, Jones had brought in a Korean-American actress named Susan Park, whom she noticed in a small part in the recent television version of "Fargo." Park was born in Los Angeles to Korean immigrants. Her parents were supportive but doubtful of her career choice until her mother watched her in "Fargo." Jones was eager for inside news about the show.

"So they're going to do a second season with a totally different cast?" she asked. "That's so interesting."

In the scene that Park was reading, Stewart tells Tina to chart a course into a new galaxy. Park played it spacey at first—she skipped a navigation class, she said, because the professor was a creep. Then she recalled that her boyfriend, Ted, had called the professor Commander Grabber, and she slowly dissolved into tears at how much she missed Ted. After a pause, Park spoke again, with mock gravity: "Hold on, something's not right. Ted's not my boyfriend." Her chin began to quiver, then she blurted, "He's my fiancé." Her face took on a dreamy aspect. "I love that word."

Jones had Park do another scene. Auditions require an actor to switch moods far faster than is called for during actual filming. In the second scene, Park played Tina as a smart-ass; in one exchange, she asks permission to wear a sweatshirt so that the male crewmen won't gawk at her. Karen, Stewart's sister, replies that she has no sweatshirts. Park looked incredulous: "So you don't have any ratty old condiment-stained sweatshirts? This is stunning to me." Park shouted, with a head wag, "I know you go baggy. Don't act like you don't."

Jones laughed—she seemed genuinely entertained. Park said goodbye. Jones popped a piece of chocolate from the waiting room into her mouth.

"Susan Park just gets it," she said.
"I've never seen someone play it so quiet and then be so fun. Actors think they have to play it big. Quiet works, too."

ones worked on "Other Space" for a month; at the time, she was also casting the fourth season of "Veep," with Julia Louis-Dreyfus. After a month, Jones had whittled a list of hundreds of actors down to fewer than two dozen. Jessie Henderson, Feig's producing partner, and Owen Ellickson, the showrunner of "Other Space," had begun watching during the middle rounds, and Feig sat in on the finals. Feig is gangly and tall, with boxy glasses; he arrived on a weekday afternoon in an English tailored suit with a Ralph Lauren tie and a pocket square. "The secret of life in the big city is wear a suit, because you can take a shit anywhere," he said. "Folks are, like, 'Hello, sir, welcome back!'"

Extra chairs were brought into the audition room. Feig clicked off his phone and looked at Jones.

"O.K., Jonesie, show me what you've got."

One of the first actors to see Feig was Karan Soni, a young Indian-American actor whom Jones had met through another of her finds, Aubrey Plaza, a star of "Parks and Recreation." Soni was from New Delhi; in his first attempt at acting, at the international prep school he attended, the instructor screamed at him that his robotic line reading in Molière's "Tartuffe" was ruining it for everybody. Soni moved to Los Angeles and graduated from the University of Southern California. He had played a regular on "Betas," a quickly cancelled Amazon show, and a large role in "Safety Not Guaranteed," an indie film.

Soni walked into the audition room wearing a button-down shirt. There were a lot of lines; to put him at ease, Feig told him that he could use his script.

"No, I can never feel comfortable," Soni said. "It's not a good thing. Always better to be terrified."

He read with Ben Harris, who was punchy from having recited the same lines so many times. At one point, Soni, as Stewart, gets on the intercom and tells the crew members to "holla if you hear me."

Harris, noting that the show is set in

the twenty-second century, improvised his own line: "Really? Holla? That line is, like, a hundred and fifty years old."

Soni played along: "They're into the past—it's a whole movement. Hipsters never die.... Did you see the new iPhone 26? Apple does it again!"

"That's hilarious," Feig said.

He had Soni do three scenes with different shadings. "See what his interpretation is when he's being super cool and smooth," Feig said at one point.

Soni complied. He told a crew member about his crush on Tina and took the scripted line "The vibe between me and her is getting intense" and added, "I don't usually sweat, but I sweat around her. She's giving off the heat." The crew member tires of his monologue; Soni riffed an apology: "What's up with you? Have you been tanning? You look good."

As Soni left, Feig shook his hand and told him that he was fantastic. A few seconds later, everyone exploded with laughter.

Feig got up to take a break and gave Jones a thumbs-up on the way out.

"Good find, Jones."

Come casting directors have been Nown to curse a director for not following a suggestion. Jones is less direct. "She doesn't do it in a confrontational way," Greg Daniels, who developed "The Office" and co-created "Parks and Recreation," told me. "She does it with a lot of blinks and facial expressions." Jones pushes actors for shows even if the part starts out small. Until Chris Pratt met with Jones, he was known only as eye candy on teen shows like "Everwood" and "The O.C.," but in a meeting Jones saw an untapped comic side. She took him to Daniels for "Parks and Recreation."

"He was so good in the audition we had to rethink everything," Daniels said. "The character"—the layabout Andy Dwyer—"was meant to be a complete asshole who was only around for a few episodes, so we had to rewrite all season long to take advantage of him."

Jones can be sneaky. She had long been a fan of the Chicago actor Nick Offerman and was impressed with his progress as a comedian. She brought him into the "Parks and Recreation" casting process early, but the producers were undecided. Jones waited a few





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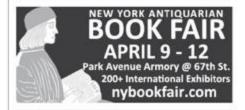
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weeks, then remarked, "Your instincts about Nick Offerman were good. Let's bring him back." The producers agreed, and Offerman went on to become the government-hating bureaucrat Ron Swanson, an anchor of the show.

"They forget that shit, they see so many people," Jones said. "I do that all the time."

Jones doesn't share in a film's profits; instead, she receives a flat fee of up to ninety thousand dollars. She cast "The Office" pilot for forty thousand dollars, and received a fraction of that for each episode, but receives nothing from reruns or digital sales of any of her shows. In the past, she has offered to take no money up front and just a tiny percentage of profit if a show does well, but producers have never taken her up on the deal. She noted that there's still no Academy Award for casting. "Believe me, it's sad for me that I have to still get a J. Crew shirt instead of a shirt from Barneys when I know that Jonah Hill is worth millions of dollars," she said. "It's not a bitter thing, but it's just, like, 'Ah shit, I'm doing something wrong.'"

After six weeks and several hundred auditions, it was time for Jones and Feig to finalize the cast for "Other Space." The male leads began to settle into place. Soni was set for Stewart, and Eugene Cordero, a Filipino sketch comedian, for Michael, Stewart's boyhood friend and downtrodden third-in-command. Neil Casey, a former "S.N.L." writer, won the part of Kent, who has awakened from a deep saline bath, where he was kept in order to provide organs for his brother.

Narrowing down the three women was a bigger challenge—an indication, Jones said, of how much the opportunities for women comics have improved in the past decade. "There have always been funny women—I mean truly funny, not fake funny. But now they are sought after, written for, and valued, not just as sidekicks or wise-cracking receptionists. Joan Rivers, Tina Fey, Amy Poehler, Melissa McCarthy are now truly culturally important."

Feig came back for a second day. Jones was pushing Vayntrub and Park for the parts of both Karen and Tina. But Park had just been cast in a Fox medical drama that was filming in Atlanta, "Red Band

Society," as the mother of a boy in a coma. Her taped auditions with Jones would have to suffice.

Vayntrub was called back so that Feig could have her read again for Karen and for the third female part, Natasha, the ship's bombshell and operating system. (Natasha worked previously on the Hooters casino space shuttle.) For the latter role, Vayntrub shook out her hair and wore a more revealing dress. She ably delivered a series of lines in which Natasha coyly begs for free will, but she didn't seem quite right for the part. She exited, and Feig looked confused.

"I thought she was going to read for Tina," he said to Jones.

Jones's face reddened and she shot an e-mail to Vayntrub's agent. The next day, Vayntrub came back, a mock pout on her face. Her hair was swept to the side, and her dress was a compromise between her uptight Karen look and the sultriness of Natasha. In the scene, Tina is being thrown a girls'-night-out party to help her get over her missing boyfriend, but she is uninterested. Vayntrub's Tina perks up at the possibility of giving Karen a makeover, and then pauses.

"Her face is so lopsided. I can't make her face my problem."

Feig laughed but asked Vayntrub to be more subtle. "Try the first scene, and make her stronger," he said. "She tries to cover up her disdain and sadness. She's trying to be strong but clearly is not."

Vayntrub nodded and tried again, improvising: "When I'm around you guys, I often feel very lonely. I'm bored. Things that interest you make me want to nap. I feel allergic to you guys."

Feig appeared to love the bit. As Vayntrub left the room, he gave her a wink. Initially, the casting of Soni had raised the question of whether Karen should resemble her brother, Stewart, but that concern had been put aside. "The show is set in the twenty-second century; it can be explained," Jones said. "Let's just go for the funniest people."

Another dozen or so women auditioned. Feig was enchanted by a woman named Conor Leslie. "She's really good, and beautiful," he said to Jones. By two-thirty, he was done. He, Ellickson, and Jones adjourned to another room to deliberate, and a few minutes later

he said that he'd settled on the finalists: "Neil Casey for Kent. Maybe we'll have Milana read with some people. Conor Leslie is literally good for any role. Karan Soni..."

Jones chimed in, "And Susan Park!" Feig wrote down the name.

hat Saturday, Feig e-mailed Ellickson and Jones with his choices: Soni as Stewart, Cordero as Michael, and Casey as Kent; Leslie as Karen, Vayntrub as Natasha, and a latecomer named Katherine Cunningham as Tina. Jones and Ellickson felt that Leslie would be hard to buy as the put-upon sister and persuaded Feig to switch her for Natasha and Vayntrub for Tina. Cunningham seemed too classically beautiful for the Karen role, so Feig switched to Rosa Salazar, a close friend of Vayntrub's. Jones pressed for Susan Park as Tina, but Feig was unpersuaded.

"I just thought the way she underplayed Tina—she had this kind of weird delivery," Feig told me later. "It was hysterical, but it just wasn't quite the dynamic we needed for the Tina character, and it wasn't quite right for the Natasha character. For this project, she fell kind of in the cracks."

Jones said, "You never get everybody. Paul will bring her back for a three-minute bit in his next movie. I'll make sure."

All that was left was to make the deals. Usually, this fell to network lawyers, but, because this was one of Yahoo's first ventures into original programming, Jones was involved in the negotiating. At first, Yahoo budgeted ten thousand dollars per actor per episode for eight episodes, and added a clause prohibiting them from auditioning for other pilots until after Yahoo had decided whether to renew "Other Space" for a second season. "I told them they're going to end up with community players from Long Beach at that rate," Jones said.

Eventually, the rate went up to between twenty thousand and thirty thousand dollars per episode for the main actors. Salazar had signed a movie deal with a studio, so Jones brought in Bess Rous, another of her favorites, for the role of Karen. Finally, the calls went out. When Vayntrub got the news, she was on a callback for a network comedy. She had been asked to return to audition for the producers. "They said, 'For this callback, they really want you, they love what you did. They just want you to be sexier, dress a little sexier.' I didn't listen to that and wore exactly what I wore to the first audition. So I go, and it's twelve men," Vayntrub said. She joked, "And I was, like, no wonder you shits wanted me to wear a short skirt while I stand here in front of you."

Susan Park didn't get a call, but when I told her that she'd been a finalist her eyes widened. "Just to know they think I'm good is amazing," she said. "I mean, Allison Jones thinks I'm good. That means everything."

n the Saturday after the casting for "Other Space" had been finalized, Jones was back at work, auditioning a long line of six- and seven-yearold girls for "Daddy's Home," an upcoming film with Will Ferrell. The day was hot, and the office air-conditioning was broken. For hours, the shiny, sweaty kids sat in grownup chairs, legs dangling, and delivered the same line: "I think it's cute that he's crying like a little bitch."

Between girls, Jones made notes. "You can tell the ones who have been coached by their parents," she said. "They're the ones making the dramatic gestures and moving out of the frame."

Some of the girls looked terrified. To ease the tension, Jones began asking them what they planned to be for Halloween. "I'm going as Corpse Bride," one said. "I'm a big fan of Tim Burton."

Toward the end of the session, a set of twins came in and gave charming but stilted readings. Jones thought she recognized their last name.

"Is your dad an actor?" she asked.

"We don't have a dad," the first girl said.

"Our mom married one, but then he decided to leave 'cause he thought Mom was being mean to him," the other said.

"But he was yelling at her," the first said.

"Oh..."

"Then he went to jail," the second girl said.

Jones said, "But you know what? You guys did great!" After they'd left, she sighed. "Jesus, I didn't see that coming."♦



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PROFILES

BORN RED

How Xi Jinping, an unremarkable provincial administrator, became China's most authoritarian leader since Mao.

BY EVAN OSNOS

n anticipation of New Year's Eve, 2014, In anticipation of Them 22. Xi Jinping, the President of China and the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, permitted a camera crew to come into his office and record a message to the people. As a teen-ager, Xi had been sent to work on a farm; he was so delicate that other laborers rated him a six on a ten-point scale, "not even as high as the women," he said later, with some embarrassment. Now, at sixty-one, Xi was five feet eleven, taller than any Chinese leader in nearly four decades, with a rich baritone and a confident heft. When he received a guest, he stood still, long arms slack, hair pomaded, a portrait of take-it-or-leave-it composure that induced his visitor to cross the room in pursuit of a handshake.

Xi's predecessor, Hu Jintao, read his annual New Year's greeting from a lectern in an antiseptic reception hall. Xi, who took office in November, 2012, has associated himself with an earthier generation of Communists, a military caste that emphasized "hard work and plain living."He delivered his New Year's message at his desk. Behind him, bookshelves held photographs that depicted him as Commander-in-Chief and family man. In one picture, he was wearing Army fatigues and a fur hat, visiting soldiers in a snowfield; in another, he was strolling with his wife and daughter, and escorting his father, Xi Zhongxun, a hallowed revolutionary, in a wheelchair. The shelves also held matching sets of books. Xi's classroom education was interrupted for nearly a decade by the Cultural Revolution, and he has the autodidact's habit of announcing his literary credentials. He often quotes from Chinese classics, and in an interview with the Russian press last year he volunteered that he had read Krylov, Pushkin, Gogol, Lermontov, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Nekrasov, Chernyshevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Sholokhov. When he visited France, he mentioned that he had read Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Sartre, and twelve others. In his New Year's remarks, Xi oscillated between socialist slogans ("Wave high the sword against corruption") and catchphrases from Chinese social media ("I would like to click the thumbs-up button for our great people"). He vowed to fight poverty, improve the rule of law, and hold fast to history. When he listed the achievements of the past year, he praised the creation of a holiday dedicated to the Second World War: "Victory Day of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression."

Xi is the sixth man to rule the People's Republic of China, and the first who was born after the revolution, in 1949. He sits atop a pyramid of eightyseven million members of the Communist Party, an organization larger than the population of Germany. The Party no longer reaches into every corner of Chinese life, as it did in the nineteenseventies, but Xi nevertheless presides over an economy that, by one measure, recently surpassed the American economy in size; he holds ultimate authority over every general, judge, editor, and state-company C.E.O. As Lenin ordained, in 1902, "For the center . . . to actually direct the orchestra, it needs to know who plays violin and where, who plays a false note and why."

Xi's New Year's message was broadcast on state television and radio channels at 6:30 P.M., just before the evening news. A few hours later, the news veered sharply out of his control. In Shanghai, a large holiday crowd had gathered to celebrate on the Bund, the promenade beside the Huangpu River, with splendid views of the skyline. The crowd was growing faster than the space could handle. Around 11:30 P.M., the police sent hundreds of extra officers to keep order, but it was too late; a stairway was jammed, and people shouted and pushed. A stam-

pede ensued. In all, thirty-six people suffocated or were trampled to death.

The disaster occurred in one of China's most modern and prosperous places, and the public was appalled. In the days that followed, the Shanghai government held a memorial for the victims, and encouraged people to move on; Internet censors struck down discussion of who was responsible; police interrogated Web users who posted criticisms of the state. When relatives of the victims visited the site of the stampede, police watched them closely, and then erected metal barriers to render it unreachable. Caixin, an investigative media organization, revealed that, during the stampede, local officials in charge of the neighborhood were enjoying a banquet of sushi and sake, at the government's expense, in a private room at the Empty Cicada, a luxury restaurant nearby. This was awkward news, because one of the President's first diktats had been "Eight Rules" for public servants, to eliminate extravagance and corruption. Among other things, the campaign called on officials to confine themselves to "four dishes and one soup." (Eventually, eleven officials were punished for misusing funds and for failing to prevent a risk to the public.)

A few weeks after the incident in Shanghai, I paid a call on a longtime editor in Beijing, whose job gives him a view into the workings of the Party. When I arrived at his apartment, his kids were in raucous control of the living room, so we retreated to his bedroom to talk. When I asked him how President Xi was doing, he mentioned the banquet at the Empty Cicada. He thought it pointed to a problem that is much deeper than a few high-living bureaucrats. "The central government issued an order absolutely forbidding them to dine out on public funds. And they did it anyway!" he said. "What this tells you is that local officials are finding their ways of responding to



When Xi was fourteen, Red Guards warned, "We can execute you a hundred times." He joined the Communist Party at twenty.

ILLUSTRATION BY TAVIS COBURN

THE NEW YORKER, APRIL 6, 2015

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"I'm sure she'll be back soon. She's just somewhere integrating awareness about something."

change. There is a saying: 'When a rule is imposed up high, there is a way to get around it below.'"The struggle between an emperor and his bureaucracy follows a classic pattern in Chinese politics, and it rarely ends well for the emperor. But the editor was betting on Xi. "He's not afraid of Heaven or Earth. And he is, as we say, round on the outside and square on the inside; he looks flexible, but inside he is very hard."

efore Xi took power, he was described, **D** in China and abroad, as an unremarkable provincial administrator, a fan of American pop culture ("The Godfather," "Saving Private Ryan") who cared more about business than about politics, and was selected mainly because he had alienated fewer peers than his competitors. It was an incomplete portrait. He had spent more than three decades in public life, but Chinese politics had exposed him to limited scrutiny. At a press conference, a local reporter once asked Xi to rate his performance: "Would you give yourself a score of a hundred—or a score of ninety?" (Neither, Xi said; a high number would look "boastful," and a low number would reflect "low self-esteem.")

But, a quarter of the way through his ten-year term, he has emerged as the most authoritarian leader since Chairman Mao. In the name of protection and purity, he has investigated tens of thousands of his countrymen, on charges ranging from corruption to leaking state secrets and inciting the overthrow of the state. He has acquired or created ten titles for himself, including not only head of state and head of the military but also leader of the Party's most powerful committees—on foreign policy, Taiwan, and the economy. He has installed himself as the head of new bodies overseeing the Internet, government restructuring, national security, and military reform, and he has effectively taken over the courts, the police, and the secret police. "He's at the center of everything," Gary Locke, the former American Ambassador to Beijing, told me.

In the Chinese Communist Party, you campaign after you get the job, not before, and in building public support and honing a message Xi has revealed a powerful desire for transformation. He calls on China to pursue the Chinese Dream: the "great rejuvenation of the nation," a mixture of prosperity, unity, and strength. He has proposed at least sixty social and economic changes, ranging from relaxing the one-child policy to eliminating camps for "reëducation through labor" and curtailing state monopolies. He has sought prestige abroad; on his first for-

eign trip (to Moscow), he was accompanied by his wife, a celebrity soprano named Peng Liyuan, who inspired lavish coverage of China's first modern Presidential couple. Peng soon appeared on *Vanity Fair's* Best-Dressed List.

After Mao, China encouraged the image of a "collective Presidency" over the importance of individual leaders. Xi has revised that approach, and his government, using old and new tools, has enlarged his image. In the spirit of Mao's Little Red Book, publishers have produced eight volumes of Xi's speeches and writings; the most recent, titled "The Remarks of Xi Jinping," dissects his utterances, ranks his favorite phrases, and explains his cultural references. A study of the People's Daily found that, by his second anniversary in office, Xi was appearing in the paper more than twice as often as his predecessor at the same point. He stars in a series of cartoons aimed at young people, beginning with "How to Make a Leader," which describes him, despite his family pedigree, as a symbol of meritocracy—"one of the secrets of the China miracle." The state news agency has taken the unprecedented step of adopting a nickname for the General Secretary: Xi Dadaroughly, Big Uncle Xi. In January, the Ministry of Defense released oil paintings depicting him in heroic poses; thousands of art students applying to the Beijing University of Technology had been judged on their ability to sketch his likeness. The Beijing Evening News reported that one applicant admired the President so much that "she had to work hard to stop her hands from trembling."

To outsiders, Xi has been a fitful subject. Bookstores in Hong Kong, which are insulated from mainland control, offer portraits of varying quality—the most reliable include "The New Biography of Xi Jinping," by Liang Jian, and "China's Future," by Wu Ming—but most are written at a remove, under pseudonyms. The clearest account of Xi's life and influences comes from his own words and decisions, scattered throughout a long climb to power.

Kevin Rudd, the former Prime Minister of Australia, a Mandarin speaker who has talked with Xi at length over the years, told me, "What he says is what he thinks. My experience of him is that there's not a lot of artifice."

In a leadership known for grooming colorless apparatchiks, Xi projects an image of manly vigor. He mocks "eggheads" and praises the "team spirit of a group of dogs eating a lion." In a meeting in March, 2013, he told the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, "We are similar in character," though Xi is less inclined toward bare-chested machismo. Xi admires Song Jiang, a fictional outlaw from "Water Margin," a fourteenthcentury Chinese classic, for his ability to "unite capable people." Neither brilliant nor handsome, Song Jiang led a band of heroic rebels. In a famous passage, he speaks of the Xunyang River: "I shall have my revenge some day / And dye red with blood the Xunyang's flow."

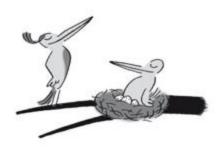
Xi describes his essential project as a rescue: he must save the People's Republic and the Communist Party before they are swamped by corruption; environmental pollution; unrest in Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and other regions; and the pressures imposed by an economy that is growing more slowly than at any time since 1990 (though still at about seven per cent, the fastest pace of any major country). "The tasks our Party faces in reform, development, and stability are more onerous than ever, and the conflicts, dangers, and challenges are more numerous than ever," Xi told the Politburo, in October. In 2014, the government arrested nearly a thousand members of civil society, more than in any year since the mid-nineteen-nineties, following the Tiananmen Square massacre, according to Chinese Human Rights Defenders, a Hong Kong-based advocacy group.

Xi unambiguously opposes American democratic notions. In 2011 and 2012, he spent several days with Vice-President Joe Biden, his official counterpart at the time, in China and the United States. Biden told me that Xi asked him why the U.S. put "so much emphasis on human rights." Biden replied to Xi, "No President of the United States could represent the United States were he not committed to human rights," and went on, "If you don't understand this, you can't deal with us. President Barack Obama would not be able to stay in power if he did not speak of it. So look at it as a political imperative. It doesn't make us better or worse. It's who we are. You make your decisions. We'll make ours."

In Xi's early months, supporters in

the West speculated that he wanted to silence hard-line critics, and would open up later, perhaps in his second term, which begins in 2017. That view has largely disappeared. Henry Paulson, the former Treasury Secretary, whose upcoming book, "Dealing with China," describes a decade of contact with Xi, told me, "He has been very forthright and candid—privately and publicly—about the fact that the Chinese are rejecting Western values and multiparty democracy." He added, "To Westerners, it seems very incongruous to be, on the one hand, so committed to fostering more competition and market-driven flexibility in the economy and, on the other hand, to be seeking more control in the political sphere, the media, and the Internet. But that's the key: he sees a strong Party as essential to stability, and the only institution that's strong enough to help him accomplish his other goals."

In his determination to gain control and protect the Party, Xi may have generated a different kind of threat: he has pried apart internal fault lines and shaken the equilibrium that for a generation marked the nation's rise. Before Xi took power, top officials presumed that they were protected. Yu Hua, the novelist, told me, "As China grew, what really came to matter were the 'unwritten rules.' When the real rules weren't specific enough or clear enough, when policies and laws lagged behind reality, you always relied on the unwritten rules." They dictated



everything from how much to tip a surgeon to how far an N.G.O. could go before it was suppressed. "The unwritten rules have been broken," Yu said. "This is how it should be, of course, but laws haven't arrived yet."

The Communist Party dedicated itself to a classless society but organized itself in a rigid hierarchy, and Xi started life near the top. He was born in Beijing in 1953, the third of four chil-

dren. His father, Xi Zhongxun, China's propaganda minister at the time, had been fomenting revolution since the age of fourteen, when he and his classmates tried to poison a teacher whom they considered a counterrevolutionary. He was sent to jail, where he joined the Communist Party, and eventually he became a high-ranking commander, which plunged him into the Party's internal feuds. In 1935, a rival faction accused Xi of disloyalty and ordered him to be buried alive, but Mao defused the crisis. At a Party meeting in February, 1952, Mao stated that the "suppression of counterrevolutionaries" required, on average, the execution of one person for every one thousand to two thousand citizens. Xi Zhongxun endorsed "severe suppression and punishment," but in his area "killing was relatively lower," according to his official biography.

Xi Jinping grew up with his father's stories. "He talked about how he joined the revolution, and he'd say, 'You will certainly make revolution in the future,"Xi recalled in a 2004 interview with the Xi'an Evening News, a state-run paper. "He'd explain what revolution is. We heard so much of this that our ears got calluses." In six decades of politics, his father had seen or deployed every tactic. At dinner with the elder Xi in 1980, David Lampton, a China specialist at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins, marvelled that he could toast dozens of guests, over glasses of Maotai, with no visible effects. "It became apparent that he was drinking water," Lamp-

When Xi Jinping was five, his father was promoted to Vice-Premier, and the son often visited him at Zhongnanhai, the secluded compound for top leaders. Xi was admitted to the exclusive August 1st School, named for the date of a famous Communist victory. The school, which occupied the former palace of a Qing Dynasty prince, was nicknamed the *lingxiu yaolan*—the "cradle of leaders." The students formed a small, close-knit élite; they lived in the same compounds, summered at the same retreats, and shared a sense of noblesse oblige. For centuries before the People's Republic, an evolving list of élite clans combined wealth and politics. Some sons handled business; others pursued high office. Winners changed over time,

and, when Communist leaders prevailed, in 1949, they acquired the mantle. "The common language used to describe this was that they had 'won over tianxia'—'all under Heaven," Yang Guobin, a sociologist at the University of Pennsylvania, told me. "They believed they had a natural claim to leadership. They owned it. And their children thought, naturally, they themselves would be, and should be, the future owners." As the historian Mi Hedu observes in his 1993 book, "The Red Guard Generation," students at the August 1st School "compared one another on the basis of whose father had a higher rank, whose father rode in a better car. Some would say, 'Obey whoever's father has the highest position." When the Cultural Revolution began, in 1966, Beijing students who were zilaihong ("born red") promoted a slogan: "If the father is a hero, the son is also a hero; if the father is a reactionary, the son is a bastard." Red Guards sought to cleanse the capital of opposition, to make it "as pure and clean as crystal," they said. From late August to late September, 1966, nearly two thousand people were killed in Beijing, and at least forty-

nine hundred historical sites were damaged or destroyed, according to Yiching Wu, the author of "The Cultural Revolution at the Margins."

But Xi Jinping did not fit cleanly into the role of either aggressor or victim. In 1962, his father was accused of supporting a novel that Mao opposed, and was sent to work in a factory; his mother, Qi Xin, was assigned to hard labor on a farm. In January, 1967, after Mao encouraged students to target "class enemies," a group of young people dragged Xi Zhongxun before a crowd. Among other charges, he was accused of having gazed at West Berlin through binoculars during a visit to East Germany years earlier. He was detained in a military garrison, where he passed the years by walking in circles, he said later—ten thousand laps, and then ten thousand walking backward. The son was too young to be an official Red Guard, and his father's status made him undesirable. Moreover, being born red was becoming a liability. Élite academies were accused of being xiao baota—"little treasure pagodas"—and shut down. Xi and the sons of other targeted officials stayed together, getting into street fights and swiping books from shuttered libraries. Later, Xi described that period as a dystopian collapse of control. He was detained "three or four times" by groups of Red Guards, and forced to denounce his father. In 2000, he told the journalist Yang Xiaohuai about being captured by a group loyal to the wife of the head of China's secret police:

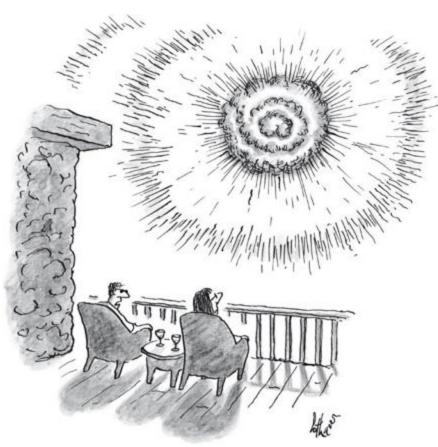
I was only fourteen. The Red Guards asked, "How serious do you yourself think your crimes are?"

"You can estimate it yourselves. Is it enough to execute me?"

"We can execute you a hundred times." To my mind there was no difference between being executed a hundred times or once, so why be afraid of a hundred times? The Red Guards wanted to scare me, saying that now I was to feel the democratic dictatorship of the people, and that I only had five minutes left. But in the end, they told me, instead, to read quotations from Chairman Mao every day until late at night.

In December, 1968, in a bid to regain control, Mao ordered the Red Guards and other students to the countryside, to be "reëducated by the poor and lowermiddle-class peasants." Elite families sent their children to regions that had allies or family, and Xi went to his father's old stronghold in Shaanxi. He was assigned to Liangjiahe, a village flanked by yellow cliffs. "The intensity of the labor shocked me," Xi recalled in a 2004 television interview. To avoid work, he took up smoking—nobody bothered a man smoking and lingered in the bathroom. After three months, he fled to Beijing, but he was arrested and returned to the village. In what later became the centerpiece of his official narrative, Xi was reborn. A recent state-news-service article offers the mythology: "Xi lived in a cave dwelling with villagers, slept on a kang, a traditional Chinese bed made of bricks and clay, endured flea bites, carried manure, built dams and repaired roads." It leaves out some brutal details. At one point, he received a letter informing him that his older half-sister Xi Heping had died. The Australian journalist John Garnaut, the author of an upcoming book on the rise of Xi and his cohort, said, "It was suicide. Close associates have said to me, on the record, that after a decade of persecution she hanged herself from a shower rail."

Xi chose to join the Communist Party's Youth League. Because of his father's status, his application was rejected seven



"The first time we see the sun in months, and it explodes."

times, by his count. After Xi befriended a local official, he was accepted. In January, 1974, he gained full Party membership and became secretary of the village. His drive to join the Party baffled some of his peers. A longtime friend who became a professor later told an American diplomat that he felt "betrayed" by Xi's ambition to "join the system." According to a U.S. diplomatic cable recounting his views, many in Xi's élite cohort were desperate to escape politics; they dated, drank, and read Western literature. They were "trying to catch up for lost years by having fun," the professor said. He eventually concluded that Xi was "exceptionally ambitious," and knew that he would "not be special" outside China, so he "chose to survive by becoming redder than the red." After all, Yang Guobin told me, referring to the sons of the former leaders, "the sense of ownership did not die. A sense of pride and superiority persisted, and there was some confidence that their fathers' adversity would be temporary and sooner or later they would make a comeback. That's exactly what happened."

The following year, Xi enrolled at Tsinghua University as a "worker-peasantsoldier" student (applicants who were admitted on the basis of political merit rather than test scores). That spring, Xi Zhongxun was rehabilitated, after sixteen years of persecution. When the family reunited, he could not recognize his grown sons. His faith never wavered. In November, 1976, he wrote to Hua Guofeng, the head of the Party, asking for reassignment, in order to "devote the rest of my life to the Party and strive to do more for the people." He signed it, "Xi Zhongxun, a Follower of Chairman Mao and a Party Member Who Has Not Regained Admission to Regular Party Activities."

Xi Jinping's pedigree had exposed him to a brutal politics—purges, retribution, rehabilitation—and he drew blunt lessons from it. In a 2000 interview with the journalist Chen Peng, of the Beijingbased *Chinese Times*, Xi said, "People who have little experience with power, those who have been far away from it, tend to regard these things as mysterious and novel. But I look past the superficial things: the power and the flowers and the glory and the applause. I see the detention houses, the fickleness of human

relationships. I understand politics on a deeper level." The Cultural Revolution and his years in Yan'an, the region where he was sent as a teen-ager, had created him. "Yan'an is the starting point of my life," he said in 2007. "Many of the fundamental ideas and qualities I have today were formed in Yan'an." Rudd, the former Australian Prime Minister, told me, "The bottom line in any understanding of who Xi Jinping is must begin with his



dedication to the Party as an institution—despite the fact that through his personal life, and his political life, he has experienced the best of the Party and the worst of the Party."

i's siblings scattered: his brother and \Lambda a sister went into business in Hong Kong, the other sister reportedly settled in Canada. But Xi stayed and, year by year, invested more deeply in the Party. After graduating, in 1979, he took a coveted job as an aide to Geng Biao, a senior defense official whom Xi's father called "my closest comrade-in-arms" from the revolution. Xi wore a military uniform and made valuable connections at Party headquarters. Not long after college, he married Ke Xiaoming, the cosmopolitan daughter of China's Ambassador to Britain. But they fought "almost every day," according to the professor, who lived across the hall. He told the diplomat that the couple divorced when Ke decided to move to England and Xi stayed behind.

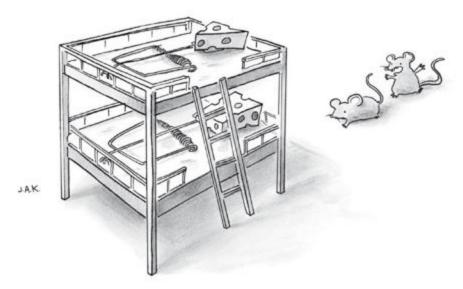
China's revolutionaries were aging, and the Party needed to groom new leaders. Xi told the professor that going to the provinces was the "only path to central power." Staying at Party headquarters in Beijing would narrow his network and invite resentment from lesser-born peers. In 1982, shortly before Xi turned thirty, he asked to be sent back to the countryside, and was assigned to a horsecart county in Hebei Province. He wanted to be the county secretary—the boss—but the provincial chief resented privi-

leged offspring from Party headquarters and made Xi the No. 2. It was the Chinese equivalent of trading an executive suite at the Pentagon for a mid-level post in rural Virginia.

Within a year, though, Xi was promoted, and he honed his political skills. He gave perks to retired cadres who could shape his reputation; he arranged for them to receive priority at doctors' offices; when he bought the county's first imported car, he donated it to the "veterancadre office," and used an old jeep for himself. He retained his green Armyissue trousers to convey humility, and he learned the value of political theatrics: if, at times, "you don't bang on the table, it's not frightening enough, and people won't take it seriously," he told a Chinese interviewer in 2003. He experimented with market economics, by allowing farmers to use more land for raising animals instead of growing grain for the state, and he pushed splashy local projects, including the construction of a television studio based on the classic novel "A Dream of Red Mansions."

In 1985, he spent two weeks in Iowa as part of an agricultural delegation. In the town of Muscatine, he stayed with Eleanor and Thomas Dvorchak. "The boys had gone off to college, so there were some spare bedrooms," Eleanor told me. Xi slept in a room with footballthemed wallpaper and "Star Trek" action figures. "He was looking out the window, and it seemed like he was saying, 'Oh, my God,' and I thought, What's so unusual? It's just a split-level," she said. Xi did not introduce himself as a Communist Party secretary; his business card identified him as the head of the Shijiazhuang Feed Association. In 2012, on a trip to the U.S. before becoming top leader, he returned to Muscatine, to see Dvorchak and others, trailed by the world press. She said, "No one in their right mind would ever think that that guy who stayed in my house would become the President. I don't care what country you're talking about."

By 1985, Xi was ready for another promotion, but the provincial Party head blocked him again, so he moved to the southern province of Fujian, where one of his father's friends was the Party secretary, and could help him. Not long after he arrived, he met Liao Wanlong, a Taiwanese businessman, who recalled, "He



"Wait! Maybe they aren't just awesome bunk beds with cheese pillows!"

was tall and stocky, and he looked a little dopey." Liao, who has visited Xi repeatedly in the decades since, told me, "He appeared to be guileless, honest. He came from the north and he didn't understand the south well." Liao went on, "He would speak only if he really had something to say, and he didn't make casual promises. He would think everything through before opening his mouth. He rarely talked about his family, because he had a difficult past and a disappointing marriage." Xi didn't have a questing mind, but he excelled at managing his image and his relationships; he was now meeting foreign investors, so he stopped wearing Army fatigues and adopted a wardrobe of Western suits. Liao said, "Not everyone could get an audience with him; he would screen those who wanted to meet him. He was a good judge of people."

The following year, when Xi was thirty-three, a friend introduced him to Peng Liyuan, who, at twenty-four, was already one of China's most famous opera and folk singers. Xi told her that he didn't watch television, she recalled in a 2007 interview. "What kind of songs do you sing?" he asked. Peng thought that he looked "uncultured and much older than his age," but he asked her questions about singing technique, which she took as a sign of intelligence. Xi later said that he decided within forty minutes to ask her to marry him. They married the following year, and in 1989, after the crack-

down on student demonstrators, Peng was among the military singers who were sent to Tiananmen Square to serenade the troops. (Images of that scene, along with information about Peng's private life and her commercial dealings, have been largely expunged from the Web.) In 1992, they had a daughter. As it became clear that Xi would be a top leader, Peng gave up the diva gowns and elaborate hairdos in favor of pants suits and the occasional military uniform. Fans still mobbed her, while he stood patiently to the side, but for the most part she stopped performing and turned her attention to activism around H.I.V., tobacco control, and women's education. For years, Xi and Peng spent most of their time apart. But, in the flurry of attention around Big Uncle Xi, the state-run media has promoted a pop song entitled "Xi Dada Loves Peng Mama," which includes the line "Men should learn from Xi and women should learn from Peng."

The posting to the south put Xi closer to his father. Since 1978, his father had served in neighboring Guangdong, home to China's experiments with the free market, and the elder Xi had become a zealous believer in economic reform as the answer to poverty. It was a risky position: at a Politburo meeting in 1987, the Old Guard attacked the liberal standard-bearer, Hu Yaobang. Xi's father was the only senior official who spoke in his defense. "What are you guys doing here? Don't repeat what Mao did to us," he said, ac-

cording to Richard Baum's 1994 chronicle of élite politics, "Burying Mao." But Xi lost and was stripped of power for the last time. He was allowed to live in comfortable obscurity until his death, in 2002, and is remembered fondly as "a man of principle, not of strategy," as the editor in Beijing put it to me.

His son avoided overly controversial reforms as he rose through the ranks. "My approach is to heat a pot with a small, continuous fire, pouring in cold water to keep it from boiling over," he said. In 1989, a local propaganda official, Kang Yanping, submitted a proposal for a TV miniseries promoting political reform, but Xi replied with skepticism. According to "China's Future," he asked, "Is there a source for the opinion? Is it a reasonable point?" The show, which Xi predicted would leave people "discouraged," was not produced. He also paid special attention to cultivating local military units; he upgraded equipment, raised subsidies for soldiers' living expenses, and found jobs for retiring officers. He liked to say, "To meet the Army's needs, nothing is excessive."

V i prosecuted corruption at some mo-🖊 ments and ignored it at others. A Chinese executive told the U.S. Embassy in Beijing that Xi was considered "Mr. Clean" for turning down a bribe, and yet, for the many years that Xi worked in Fujian, the Yuanhua Group, one of China's largest corrupt enterprises, continued smuggling billions of dollars' worth of oil, cars, cigarettes, and appliances into China, with the help of the Fujian military and police. Xi also found a way to live with Chen Kai, a local tycoon who ran casinos and brothels in the center of town, protected by the police chief. Later, Chen was arrested, tried, and sentenced to death, and fifty government officials were prosecuted for accepting bribes from him. Xi was never linked to the cases, but they left a stain on his tenure. "Sometimes I have posted colleagues wrongly," he said in 2000. "Some were posted wrongly because I thought they were better than they actually were, others because I thought they were worse than they actually were."

Xi proved adept at navigating internal feuds and alliances. After he took over the economically vibrant province of Zhejiang, in 2002, he created policies

intended to promote private businesses. He encouraged taxi services to buy from Geely, the car company that later bought Volvo. He soothed conservatives, in part by reciting socialist incantations. "The private economy has become an exotic flower in the garden of socialism with Chinese characteristics," he declared. In 2007, he encountered a prime opportunity to show his political skills: a corruption scandal in Shanghai was implicating associates of Jiang Zemin, the powerful former President, who served from 1989 to 2002. Xi was sent to Shanghai to take over. He projected toughness to the public without alienating Jiang. He rejected the villa that had been arranged for him, announcing that it would be better used as a retirement home for veteran comrades.

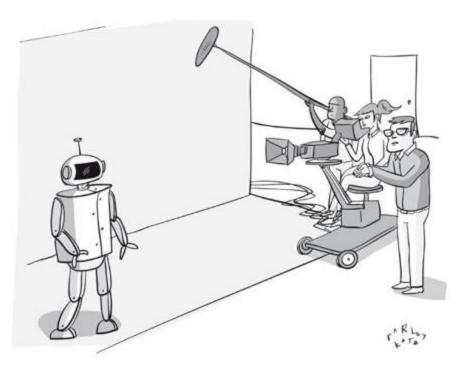
His timing was fortunate: a few months later, senior Party officials were choosing the next generation of top leaders. Xi was expected to lose to Li Keqiang, a comrade who had no revolutionary family pedigree, and had postgraduate degrees in law and economics from Peking University. Since 2002, the highest ranks of Chinese politics had been dominated by men who elbowed their way in on the basis of academic or technocratic merit. President Hu's father ran a tea shop, and the Premier, Wen Jiabao, was the son of a teacher, but Chen Yun, the late economic czar, had advised his peers that born reds, now known as "second-generation reds," or princelings, would make more reliable stewards of the Party's future. One princeling told a Western diplomat, "The feeling among us is: 'Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao, your fathers were selling shoelaces while our fathers were dying for this revolution." In private, some princelings referred to the President and the Premier as huoji—"hired hands." In October, 2007, Xi was unveiled as the likely heir apparent. It was not entirely a compliment. "Party leaders prefer weak successors, so they can rule behind the scenes," Ho Pin, the founder of Mingjing News, an overseas Chinese site, said. Xi's rise had been so abrupt, in the eyes of the general public, that people joked, "Who is Xi Jinping? He's Peng Liyuan's husband."

Xi was tested by a pageant of dysfunction that erupted in the run-up to his début as General Secretary, in 2012. In

February, Wang Lijun, a former police chief, tried to defect to the U.S. and accused the family of his former patron, Bo Xilai, the Party secretary of Chongqing, of murder and embezzlement. Party leaders feared that Bo might protect himself with the security services at his command, disrupt the transition of power, and tear the Party apart. In September, Ling Jihua, the chief of staff of the outgoing President, was abruptly demoted, and he was later accused of trying to cover up the death of his son, who had crashed a black Ferrari while accompanied by two women.

Beset by crises, Xi suddenly disappeared. On September 4, 2012, he cancelled a meeting with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and visits with other dignitaries. As the days passed, lurid rumors emerged, ranging from a grave illness to an assassination attempt. When he reappeared, on September 19th, he told American officials that he had injured his back. Analysts of Chinese politics still raise the subject of Xi's disappearance in the belief that a fuller explanation of why he vanished might illuminate the depth, or fragility, of his support. In dozens of conversations this winter, scholars, officials, journalists, and executives told me that they suspect he did have a health problem, and also reasons to exploit it. They speculate that Xi, in effect, went on strike; he wanted to install key allies, and remove opponents, before taking power, but Party elders ordered him to wait. A former intelligence official told me, "Xi basically says, 'O.K., fuck you, let's see you find someone else for this job. I'm going to disappear for two weeks and miss the Secretary of State.' And that's what he did. It caused a stir, and they went running and said, 'Whoa, whoa, whoa.'" The handoff went ahead as planned. On November 15, 2012, Xi became General Secretary.

X i headed a Politburo Standing Committee of seven men: four were considered princelings by birth or marriage, a larger ratio than in any Politburo in the history of the People's Republic. Western politicians often note that Xi has the habits of a retail pol: comfort on the rope line, gentle questions for every visitor, homey anecdotes. On a trip to Los Angeles, he told students that he likes to swim, read, and watch sports on television, but rarely has time. "To borrow a title from an American film, it's like 'Mission: Impossible," he said. But Chinese observers tend to mention something else: his guizuqi, or "air of nobility." It can come off as a reassuring link to the past or, at times, as a distance from his peers. In a meeting at the Great Hall of the



"In this scene, imagine you're sentient and know what feelings are."

People last year, Party officials were chatting and glad-handing during a lengthy break, but Xi never budged. "It went on for hours, and he sat there, staring straight ahead," a foreign attendee told me. "He never wandered down from the podium to say, 'How's it going in Ningxia?'"

Xi believed that there was a grave threat to China from within. According to U.S. diplomats, Xi's friend the professor described Xi as "repulsed by the allencompassing commercialization of Chinese society, with its attendant nouveaux riches, official corruption, loss of values, dignity, and self-respect, and such 'moral evils' as drugs and prostitution." If he ever became China's top leader, the professor had predicted, "he would likely aggressively attempt to address these evils, perhaps at the expense of the new moneyed class." Though princelings and their siblings had profited comfortably from China's rise (Xi's sister Qi Qiaoqiao is reported to have large corporate and real-estate assets), the revolutionary families considered their gains appropriate, and they blamed the hired hands for allowing corruption and extravagance, which stirred up public rage and threatened the Party's future.

The first step to a solution was to reëstablish control. The "collective Presidency," which spread power across the Standing Committee, had constrained Hu Jintao so thoroughly that he was nicknamed the Woman with Bound Feet. Xi surrounded himself with a shadow cabinet that was defined less by a single ideology than by school ties and political reliability. Members included Liu He, a childhood playmate who had become a reform-minded economist, and Liu Yuan, a hawkish general and the son of former President Liu Shaoqi. The most important was Wang Qishan, a friend for decades, who was placed in charge of the Central Commission on Discipline and Inspection, the agency that launched the vast anticorruption campaign.

The Party had long cultivated an image of virtuous unanimity. But, during the next two years, Wang's investigators, who were granted broad powers to detain and interrogate, attacked agencies that might counter Xi's authority, accusing them of conspiracies and abuses. They brought corruption charges against officials at the state-planning and state-assets commissions, which protect the privileges of large government-run monopolies. They ar-

rested China's security chief, Zhou Yongkang, a former oil baron with the jowls of an Easter Island statue, who had built the police and military into a personal kingdom that received more funding each year for domestic spying and policing than it did for foreign defense. They reached into the ranks of the military, where flamboyant corruption was not only upsetting the public-pedestrians had learned to watch out for luxury sedans with military license plates, which careered around Beijing with impunitybut also undermining China's national defense. When police searched homes belonging to the family of Lieutenant General Gu Junshan, a senior logistics chief, they removed four truckloads of wine, art, cash, and other luxuries. According to a diplomat in Beijing, Gu's furnishings included a gold replica of China's first aircraft carrier. "When questioned about it, he said it was a sign of patriotism," the diplomat said.

By the end of 2014, the Party had announced the punishment of more than a hundred thousand officials on corruption charges. Many foreign observers asked if Xi's crusade was truly intended to stamp out corruption or if it was a tool to attack his enemies. It was not simply one or the other: corruption had become so threatening to the Party's legitimacy that only the most isolated leader could have avoided forcing it back to a more manageable level, but railing against corruption was also a proven instrument for political consolidation, and at the highest levels Xi has deployed it largely against his opponents. Geremie Barme, the historian who heads the Australian Centre on China in the World, analyzed the forty-eight most highprofile arrests, and discovered that none of them were second-generation reds. "I don't call it an anticorruption campaign,' a Western diplomat told me. "This is grinding trench warfare."

Shortly after taking over, Xi asked, "Why did the Soviet Communist Party collapse?" and declared, "It's a profound lesson for us." Chinese scholars had studied that puzzle from dozens of angles, but Xi wanted more. "In 2009, he commissioned a long study of the Soviet Union from somebody who works in the policy-research office," the diplomat in Beijing told me. "It concluded that the rot started under Brezhnev. In

the paper, the guy cited a joke: Brezhnev brings his mother to Moscow. He proudly shows her the state apartments at the Kremlin, his Zil limousine, and the life of luxury he now lives. 'Well, what do you think, Mama,' says Brezhnev. 'You'll never have to worry about a thing, ever again.' 'I'm so proud of you, Leonid Ilyich,' says Mama, 'but what happens if the Communists find out?' Xi loved the story." Xi reserved special scorn for Gorbachev, for failing to defend the Party against its opponents, and told his colleagues, "Nobody was man enough to stand up and resist."

The year after Xi took office, cadres were required to watch a six-part documentary on the Soviet Union's collapse, which showed violent scenes of unrest and described an American conspiracy to topple Communism through "peaceful evolution": the steady infiltration of subversive Western political ideas. Ever since the early aughts, when "color revolutions" erupted in the former Soviet bloc, Chinese Communists have cited the risk of contagion as a reason to constrict political life. That fear was heightened by a surge of unrest in Tibet in 2008, in Xinjiang in 2009, and across the Arab world in 2011. Last September, when pro-democracy protests erupted in Hong Kong, an opinion piece in the Global Times, a state-run daily, accused the National Endowment for Democracy and the C.I.A. of being "black hands" behind the unrest, intent on "stimulating Taiwanese independence, Xinjiang independence, and Tibetan independence." (The U.S. denied involvement.)

Xi's government has no place for loyal opposition. When he launched the anticorruption campaign, activists—such as the lawyer Xu Zhiyong, who had served as a local legislator in Beijing—joined in, calling on officials to disclose their incomes. But Xu and many others were arrested. (He was later sentenced to four years in prison for "gathering crowds to disrupt public order.") One of Xu's former colleagues, Teng Biao, told me, "For the government, 'peaceful evolution' was not just a slogan. It was real. The influence of Western states was becoming more obvious and more powerful." Teng was at a conference in Germany soon after Xu and another colleague were arrested. "People advised me not to return to China, or I'd be arrested, too," Teng said. He is now

a visiting scholar at Harvard Law School.

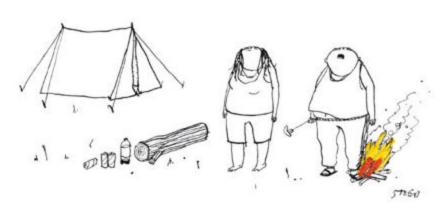
A prominent editor in Beijing told me that Chinese philanthropists have been warned, "You can't give money to this N.G.O. or that N.G.O.—basically all N.G.O.s." In December, the Committee to Protect Journalists counted forty-four reporters in Chinese jails, more than in any other country. Well-known human-rights lawyers—Pu Zhiqiang, Ding Jiaxi, Xia Lin—have been jailed. Earlier this month, Human Rights Watch called this the harshest suppression of dissent in a decade.

Although Vladimir Putin has suffocated Russian civil society and neutered the press, Moscow stores still carry books that are critical of him, and a few long-suffering blogs still find ways to attack him. Xi is less tolerant. In February, 2014, Yiu Mantin, a seventy-nine-year-old editor at Hong Kong's Morning Bell Press, who had planned to release a biography critical of Xi, by the exiled writer Yu Jie, was arrested during a visit to the mainland. He had received a phone call warning him not to proceed with publication. He was sentenced to ten years in prison, on charges of smuggling seven cans of paint.

For years, Chinese intellectuals distinguished between words and actions: Western political ideas could be discussed in China as long as nobody tried to enact them. In 2011, China's education minister, Yuan Guiren, extolled the benefits of exchanges with foreign countries. "Whether they're rich or poor, socialist or capitalist, as long as they're beneficial to our development we can learn from all of them," he told the Jinghua Times, a state newspaper. But in January Yuan told a conference, "Young teachers and students are key targets of infiltration by enemy forces." He said, "We must, by no means, allow into our classrooms material that propagates Western values." An article on the Web site of Seeking Truth, an official Party journal, warned against professors who "blacken China's name," and it singled out the law professor He Weifang by name. When I spoke to He, a few days later, he said, "I've always been unpopular with conservatives, but recently the situation has become more serious. The political standpoint of this new slate of leaders isn't like that of the Hu or Jiang era. They're more restraining. They're not as willing to permit an active discussion."

Sealing China off from Western ideas





"Kinda makes you feel insignificant and incredibly hot, doesn't it?"



"You give me permission to laugh."

poses some practical problems. The Party has announced "rule of law" reforms intended to strengthen top-down control over the legal system and shield courts from local interference. The professor said, "Many colleagues working on civil law and that sort of thing have a large portion of their lectures about German law or French law. So, if you want to stop Western values from spreading in Chinese universities, one thing you'd have to do is close down the law schools and make sure they never exist again." Xi, for his part, sees no contradiction, because preservation of the Party comes before preservation of the law. In January, he said that China must "nurture a legal corps loyal to the Party, loyal to the country, loyal to the people, and loyal

to the law." Echoing Mao, he added, "Insure that the handle of the knife is firmly in the hand of the Party and the people."

I's wariness of Western influence is reflected in his foreign policy. On a personal level, he expresses warm memories of Iowa, and he sent his daughter, Xi Mingze, to Harvard. (She graduated last year, under a pseudonym, and has returned to China.) But Xi has also expressed an essentialist view of national characteristics such that, in his telling, China's history and social makeup render it unfit for multiparty democracy or a monarchy or any other non-Communist system. "We considered them, tried them, but none worked," he told an audience

at the College of Europe, in Bruges, last spring. Adopting an alternative, he said, "might even lead to catastrophic consequences." On his watch, state-run media have accentuated the threat of "peaceful evolution," and have accused American companies, including Microsoft, Cisco, and Intel, of being "warriors" for the U.S. government.

As for a broad diplomatic vision, Chinese leaders since Deng Xiaoping have adhered to a principle known as "Hide your strength, bide your time." Xi has effectively replaced that concept with declarations of China's arrival. In Paris last year, he invoked Napoleon's remark that China was "a sleeping lion," and said that the lion "has already awakened, but this is a peaceful, pleasant, and civilized lion." He told the Politburo in December that he intends to "make China's voice heard, and inject more Chinese elements into international rules." As alternatives to the Washington-based World Bank and International Monetary Fund, Xi's government has established the New Development Bank, the Silk Road infrastructure fund, and the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, which, together, intend to amass two hundred and forty billion dollars in capital. Xi has been far bolder than his predecessors in asserting Chinese control over airspace and land, sending an oil rig into contested waters, and erecting buildings, helipads, and other facilities on reefs that are claimed by multiple nations. He has also taken advantage of Putin's growing economic isolation; Xi has met with Putin more than with any other foreign leader, and, last May, as Russia faced new sanctions over the annexation of Crimea, Xi and Putin agreed on a four-hundredbillion-dollar deal to supply gas to China at rates that favor Beijing. According to the prominent editor, Xi has told people that he was impressed by Putin's seizure of Crimea—"He got a large piece of land and resources" and boosted his poll numbers at home. But, as war in Ukraine has dragged on, Xi has become less complimentary of Putin.

No diplomatic relationship matters more to China's future than its dealings with the United States, and Xi has urged the U.S. to adopt a "new type of great-power relationship"—to regard China as an equal and to acknowledge its claims to contested islands and other interests.

(The Obama Administration has declined to adopt the phrase.) Xi and Obama have met, at length, five times. American officials describe the relationship as occasionally candid but not close. They have "brutally frank exchanges on difficult issues, and it doesn't upset the apple cart," a senior Administration official told me. "So it's different from the era of Hu Jintao, where there was very little exchange." Hu almost never departed from his notes, and American counterparts wondered how much he believed his talking points. "Xi is reading what I'm confident Xi believes," the official said, though their engagements remain stilted: "There's still a cadence that is very difficult to extract yourself from in these exchanges.... We want to have a conversation.'

For years, American military leaders worried that there was a growing risk of an accidental clash between China and the U.S., in part because Beijing protested U.S. policies by declining meetings between senior commanders. In 2011, Mike Mullen, then the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, visited Xi in Beijing, and appealed to his military experience, telling him, as he recalled to me, "I just need you to stop cutting off military relationships as step one, every time you get ticked off." That has improved. In Beijing last November, Xi and Obama spent five hours at dinner and meetings and announced coöperation on climate change, a high-tech freetrade deal that China had previously resisted, and two military agreements to encourage communication between forces operating near each other in the South China and East China Seas. Mullen, who has met Xi again since their initial encounter, is encouraged: "They still get ticked off, they take steps, but they don't cut it off."

As China ejects Western ideas, Xi is trying to fill that void with an affirmative set of ideas to offer at home and abroad. Recently, I rode the No. 1 subway line eastbound, beneath the Avenue of Eternal Peace—under Party headquarters, the Central Propaganda Department, and the Ministries of Commerce and Public Security—and got off the train at the Second Ring Road, where the old City Wall once stood. Near the station, at a Starbucks, I met Zhang Lifan, a well-known historian. At sixty-

four, he defies the usual rumpled stereotype of the liberal intelligentsia; he is tall, with elegant hints of gray hair, and he wore a black mandarin-collar jacket and a winter cap covered in smooth black fur. Zhang grew up around politics; his father, a banker before the revolution, served as a minister in the early years of Mao's government. I asked him what message Xi hoped to promote from China around the world. He said, "Ever since Mao's day, and the beginning of reform and opening up, we all talk about a 'crisis of faith,'" the sense that rapid growth and political turmoil have cut China off from its moral history. "He is trying to solve that problem, so that there can be another new ideology."

Zhang writes about politics, and he is occasionally visited by police who remind him to avoid sensitive subjects. "Sometimes, they will pass by and say it through the closed front door," Zhang said. He commented, "They tried to stop me from coming today. They followed me here."He indicated a slim young man in a windbreaker, watching us from a nearby table. In remote areas, where police are unaccustomed to the presence of foreigners, authorities often try to prevent people from meeting reporters. But, in a decade of writing about China, this was the first time I'd encountered that situation in the capital. I suggested we postpone our discussion. He shook his



head. In a stage whisper, he said, "What I say and what I write are the same. There's no difference."

The most surprising thing about the era of Xi Jinping is the decision to close off the margins—those minor mutinies and indulgences that used to be tolerated as a way to avoid driving China's most prosperous and well-educated citizens abroad. For years, the government tacitly allowed people to gain access to virtual private networks, or V.P.N.s, which allow users to reach Web sites that

are blocked in China. The risks seemed manageable; most Chinese users had less interest in politics than in reaching a celebrity's Instagram feed (Instagram, like Facebook, Twitter, Bloomberg, Reuters, and the *Times*, is blocked). Keeping them open, the theory went, allowed sophisticated users to get what they wanted or needed—for instance, researchers accessing Google Scholar, or businesses doing transactions—while preventing the masses from employing technology that worries the Party. But on January 23rd, while I was in Beijing, the government abruptly blocked the V.P.N.s, and state media reiterated that they were illegal. Overnight, it became radically more difficult to reach anything on the Internet outside China. Before the comments were shut down on the Web site Computer News, twelve thousand people left their views. "What are you afraid of?" one asked. "Big step toward becoming a new North Korea," another wrote. Another wrote: "One more advertisement for emigration."

A decade ago, the Chinese Internet was alive with debate, confession, humor, and discovery. Month by month, it is becoming more sterilized and self-contained. To the degree that China's connection to the outside world matters, the digital links are deteriorating. Voice-over-Internet calls, viral videos, podcasts—the minor accessories of contemporary digital life—are less reachable abroad than they were a year ago. It's an astonishing thing to observe in a rising superpower. How many countries in 2015 have an Internet connection to the world that is worse than it was a year ago?

The General Secretary, in his capacity as Big Uncle Xi, has taken to offering advice on nonpolitical matters: last fall, he lamented an overly "sensual" trend in society. (In response, Chinese auto executives stopped having lightly clad models lounge around vehicles at car shows.) In January, he urged people to get more sleep, "however enthusiastic you may be about the job," saying that he goes to bed before midnight. Online, people joked that it seemed implausible: since taking office, Xi has acquired heavy bags under his eyes and a look of near-constant irritation.

For a generation, the Communist Party forged a political consensus built on

economic growth and legal ambiguity. Liberal activists and corrupt bureaucrats learned to skirt (or flout) legal boundaries, because the Party objected only intermittently. Today, Xi has indicated that consensus, beyond the Party élite, is superfluous—or, at least, less reliable than a hard boundary between enemies and friends.

It is difficult to know precisely how much support Xi enjoys. Private pollsters are not allowed to explicitly measure his public support, but Victor Yuan, the president of Horizon Research Consultancy Group, a Beijing polling firm, told me, "We've done some indirect research, and his support seems to be around eighty per cent. It comes from two areas: one is the anticorruption policy and the other is foreign policy. The area where it's unclear is the economy. People say they'll have to wait and see."

China's economy is likely to be Xi's greatest obstacle. After economic growth of, on average, nearly ten per cent a year, for more than three decades, the Party expected growth to slow to a sustainable pace of around seven per cent, but it could fall more sharply. China remains the world's largest manufacturer, with four

trillion dollars in foreign-exchange reserves (a sum equivalent to the world's fourth-largest economy). In November, 2013, the Party announced plans to reinvigorate competition by expanding the role of private banks, allowing the market (instead of bureaucrats) to decide where water, oil, and other precious resources are directed, and forcing state firms to give up larger dividends and compete with private businesses. Last spring, China abolished registeredcapital and other requirements for new companies, and in November it allowed foreign investors to trade shares directly on the Shanghai stock market for the first time. "A fair judgment is that Xi's government has achieved more progress, in more areas, in the past eighteen months than the Hu government did in its entire second term," Arthur Kroeber, a longtime Beijing-based economist at Gavekal Dragonomics, a research firm, told me. And yet, Kroeber added, "my confidence level is only slightly above fifty per cent" that the reforms will be enough to head off a recession.

The risks to China's economy have rarely been more visible. The workforce is aging more quickly than in other coun-

tries (because of the one-child policy), and businesses are borrowing money more rapidly than they are earning it. David Kelly, a co-founder of China Policy, a Beijing-based research and advisory firm, said, "The turning point in the economy really was about four, five years ago, and now you see the classical problem of the declining productivity of capital. For every dollar you invest, you're getting far less bang for your buck." The growth of demand for energy and raw materials has slowed, more houses and malls are empty, and nervous Chinese savers are sending money overseas, to protect it in the event of a crisis. Some factories have not paid wages, and in the last quarter of 2014 workers held strikes, or other forms of protest, at three times the rate of the same period a year earlier.

Xi's ability to avoid an economic crisis depends partly on whether he has the political strength to prevail over state firms, local governments, and other powerful interests. In his meetings with Rudd, the former Australian Prime Minister, Xi mentioned his father's frustrated attempts to achieve market-oriented reforms. "Xi Jinping is legitimately proud of his father," Rudd said, adding, "His father had a record of real achievement and was, frankly, a person who paid a huge political and personal price for being a dedicated Party man and a dedicated economic reformer."

Historically, the Party has never perceived a contradiction between political crackdown and economic reform. In 2005, Premier Wen Jiabao met with a delegation from the U.S. Congress, and one member, citing a professor who had recently been fired for political reasons, asked the Premier why. Wen was baffled by the inquiry; the professor was a "small problem," he said. "I don't know the person you spoke of, but as Premier I have 1.3 billion people on my mind."

To maintain economic growth, China is straining to promote innovation, but by enforcing a political chill on Chinese campuses Xi risks suppressing precisely the disruptive thinking that the country needs for the future. At times, politics prevails over rational calculations. In 2014, after China had spent years investing in science and technology, the share of its economy devoted to research and development surpassed Europe's. But, when the government



"I'll have what she's having when she decides what she's having."

announced the recipients of grants for social-science research, seven of the top ten projects were dedicated to analyzing Xi's speeches (officially known as "General Secretary Xi's Series of Important Speeches") or his signature slogan: the Chinese Dream.

The era of Xi Jinping has defied the assumption that China's fitful opening to the world is too critical and productive to stall. The Party today perceives an array of threats that, in the view of He Weifang, the law professor, will only increase in the years ahead. Before the Web, the professor said, "there really weren't very many people who were able to access information from outside, so in Deng Xiaoping's era the Party could afford to be a lot more open." But now, if the Internet were unrestricted, "I believe it would bring in things that the leaders would consider very dangerous."

Like many others I met this winter, He Weifang worries that the Party is narrowing the range of acceptable adaptation to the point that it risks uncontrollable change. I asked him what he thinks the Party will be like in ten or fifteen years. "I think, as intellectuals, we must do everything we can to promote a peaceful transformation of the Party—to encourage it to become a 'leftist party' in the European sense, a kind of social-democratic party."That, he said, would help its members better respect a true system of law and political competition, including freedom of the press and freedom of thought. "If they refuse even these basic changes, then I believe China will undergo another revolution."

It is a dramatic prediction—and an oddly commonplace one these days. Zhang Lifan, the historian I saw at Starbucks, said, in full view of his minder, "In front of a lot of princeling friends, I've said that, if the Communist Party can't take sufficient political reform in five or ten years, it could miss the chance entirely. As scholars, we always say it's better to have reform than revolution, but in Chinese history this cycle repeats itself. Mao said we have to get rid of the cycle, but right now we're still in it. This is very worrying."

Two months after the events of New Year's Eve, the Party again confronted a collision between its instinct for con-



"You don't have to do the quotes every time, Brian—we know you're not Shakespeare."

trol and the complexity of Chinese society. For years, the government had downplayed the severity of environmental pollution, describing it as an unavoidable cost of growth. But, year by year, the middle class was becoming less accommodating; in polls, urban citizens described pollution as their leading concern, and, using smartphones, they compared daily pollution levels to the standards set by the World Health Organization. After a surge of smog in 2013, the government intensified efforts to consolidate power plants, close small polluters, and tighten state control. Last year, it declared a "war against pollution," but conceded that Beijing will not likely achieve healthy air before 2030. In a moment of candor, the mayor pronounced the city "unlivable."

In February, Chinese video sites posted a privately funded documentary, titled "Under the Dome," in which Chai Jing, a former state-television reporter, described her growing alarm at the risks that air pollution poses to her infant daughter. It was a sophisticated production: Chai, in fashionable faded jeans and a white blouse, delivered a fast-paced, TED-style talk to a rapt studio audience, unspooling grim statistics and scenes in which bureaucrats admitted that power-

ful companies and agencies had rendered them incapable of protecting public health. In spirit, the film was consistent with the official "war on corruption," and staterun media responded with a coördinated array of flattering coverage.

The film raced across social media, and by the end of the first week it had been viewed two hundred million times—a level usually reserved for pop-music videos rather than dense, two-hour documentaries. The following weekend, the authorities ordered video sites to withdraw the film, and news organizations took down their coverage. As quickly as it had appeared, the film vanished from the Chinese Web—a phenomenon undone.

In the era of Xi Jinping, the public had proved, again, to be an unpredictable partner. It was a lesson that Xi absorbed long ago. "The people elevated me to this position so that I'd listen to them and benefit them," he said in 2000. "But, in the face of all these opinions and comments, I had to learn to enjoy having my errors pointed out to me, but not to be swayed too much by that. Just because so-and-so says something, I'm not going to start weighing every cost and benefit. I'm not going to lose my appetite over it." ◆

DEPT. OF THE ENVIRONMENT

CARBON CAPTURE

Has climate change made it harder for people to care about conservation?

BY JONATHAN FRANZEN

Tast September, as someone who ✓ cares more about birds than the next man, I was following the story of the new stadium that the Twin Cities are building for their football Vikings. The stadium's glass walls were expected to kill thousands of birds every year, and local bird-lovers had asked its sponsors to use a specially patterned glass to reduce collisions; the glass would have raised the stadium's cost by one tenth of one per cent, and the sponsors had balked. Around the same time, the National Audubon Society issued a press release declaring climate change "the greatest threat" to American birds and warning that "nearly half" of North America's bird species were at risk of losing their habitats by 2080. Audubon's announcement was credulously retransmitted by national and local media, including the Minneapolis Star Tribune, whose blogger on bird-related subjects, Jim Williams, drew the inevitable inference: Why argue about stadium glass when the real threat to birds was climate change? In comparison, Williams said, a few thousand bird deaths would be "nothing."

I was in Santa Cruz, California, and already not in a good mood. The day I saw the Williams quote was the two hundred and fifty-fourth of a year in which, so far, sixteen had qualified as rainy. To the injury of a brutal drought came the daily insult of radio forecasters describing the weather as beautiful. It wasn't that I didn't share Williams's anxiety about the future. What upset me was how a dire prophecy like Audubon's could lead to indifference toward birds in the present.

Maybe it's because I was raised as a Protestant and became an environmentalist, but I've long been struck by the spiritual kinship of environmentalism and New England Puritanism. Both belief systems are haunted by the feeling that simply to be human is to be guilty. In the case of environmentalism, the feeling is grounded in scientific fact. Whether it's prehistoric North Americans hunting the mastodon to extinction, Maori wiping out the megafauna of New Zealand, or modern civilization deforesting the planet and emptying the oceans, human beings are universal killers of the natural world. And now climate change has given us an eschatology for reckoning with our guilt: coming soon, some hellishly overheated tomorrow, is Judgment Day. Unless we repent and mend our ways, we'll all be sinners in the hands of an angry Earth.

I'm still susceptible to this sort of puritanism. Rarely do I board an airplane or drive to the grocery store without considering my carbon footprint and feeling guilty about it. But when I started watching birds, and worrying about their welfare, I became attracted to a countervailing strain of Christianity, inspired by St. Francis of Assisi's example of loving what's concrete and vulnerable and right in front of us. I gave my support to the focussed work of the American Bird Conservancy and local Audubon societies. Even the most ominously degraded landscape could make me happy if it had birds in it.

And so I came to feel miserably conflicted about climate change. I accepted its supremacy as the environmental issue of our time, but I felt bullied by its dominance. Not only did it make every grocery-store run a guilt trip; it made me feel selfish for caring more about birds in the present than about people in the future. What were the eagles and the condors killed by

wind turbines compared with the impact of rising sea levels on poor nations? What were the endemic cloudforest birds of the Andes compared with the atmospheric benefits of Andean hydroelectric projects?

A hundred years ago, the National Audubon Society was an activist organization, campaigning against wanton bird slaughter and the harvesting of herons for their feathers, but its spirit has since become gentler. In recent decades, it's been better known for its holiday cards and its plush-toy cardinals and bluebirds, which sing when you squeeze them. When the organization shifted into Jonathan Edwards mode, last September, I wondered what was going on.

In rolling out its climate-change initiative, Audubon alluded to the "citizen science data" it had mobilized, and to a "report," prepared by its own scientists, that justified its dire predictions. Visitors to its updated Web site were treated to images of climateimperilled species, such as the bald eagle, and asked to "take the pledge" to help save them. The actions that Audubon suggested to pledge-takers were gentle stuff-tell your stories, create a bird-friendly yard—but the Web site also offered a "Climate Action Pledge," which was long and detailed and included things like replacing your incandescent light bulbs with lowerwattage alternatives.

The climate-change report was not immediately available, but from the Web site's graphics, which included range maps of various bird species, it was possible to deduce that the report's method involved a comparison of a species' present range with its predicted range in a climate-altered future. When there was broad overlap between the two ranges, it was assumed that the

To slow global warming, we could blight every landscape with biofuel crops and wind turbines. But what about wildlife today?



species would survive. When there was little or no overlap, it was assumed that the species would be caught between an old range that had grown inhospitable to it and a new range in which the habitat was wrong, and would be at risk of disappearing.

This kind of modelling can be useful, but it's fraught with uncertainties. A species may currently breed in a habitat with a particular average temperature, but this doesn't mean that it couldn't tolerate a higher temperature, or that it couldn't adapt to a slightly different habitat farther north, or that the more northerly habitat won't change as temperatures rise. North American species in general, having contended with blazing July days and frosty September nights as they evolved, are much more tolerant of temperature fluctuations than tropical species are. Although, in any given place, some familiar back-yard birds may have disappeared by 2080, species from farther south are likely to have moved in to take their place. North America's avifauna may well become more diverse.

The bald eagle was an especially odd choice of poster bird for Audubon's initiative. The species nearly became extinct fifty years ago, before DDT was banned. The only reason we can worry about its future today is that the public—led by the then energetic Audubon—rallied around an *immedi*ate threat to it. The eagle's plight was a primary impetus for the Endangered Species Act of 1973, and the eagle is one of the act's great success stories. Once its eggs were no longer weakened by DDT, its population and range expanded so dramatically that it was removed from the endangered-species list in 2007. The eagle rebounded because it's a resilient and resourceful bird, a generalist hunter and scavenger, capable of travelling large distances to colonize new territory. It's hard to think of a species less liable to be trapped by geography. Even if global warming squeezes it entirely out of its current summer and winter ranges, the melting of ice in Alaska and Canada may actually result in a larger new range.

But climate change is seductive to organizations that want to be taken

seriously. Besides being a ready-made meme, it's usefully imponderable: while peer-reviewed scientific estimates put the annual American death toll of birds from collisions and from outdoor cats at more than three billion, no individual bird death can be definitively attributed to climate change (since local and short-term weather patterns have nonlinear causes). Although you could demonstrably save the lives of the birds now colliding with your windows or being killed by your cats, reducing your carbon footprint even to zero saves nothing. Declaring climate change bad for birds is therefore the opposite of controversial. To demand a ban on lead ammunition (lead poisoning is the foremost cause of California condor deaths) would alienate hunters. To take an aggressive stand against the overharvesting of horseshoe crabs (the real reason that the red knot, a shorebird, had to be put on the list of threatened U.S. species this winter) might embarrass the Obama Administration, whose director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, in announcing the listing, laid the blame for the red knot's decline primarily on "climate change," a politically more palatable culprit. Climate change is everyone's fault-in other words, no one's. We can all feel good about deploring it.

There's no doubt that the coming century will be a tough one for wild animals. But, for countless species, including almost all of North America's birds, the threat is not direct. The responses of birds to acute climatic stress are not well studied, but birds have been adapting to such stresses for tens of millions of years, and they're surprising us all the time—emperor penguins relocating their breeding grounds as the Antarctic ice melts, tundra swans leaving the water and learning to glean grains from agricultural fields. Not every species will manage to adapt. But the larger and healthier and more diverse our bird populations are, the greater the chances that many species will survive, even thrive. To prevent extinctions in the future, it's not enough to curb our carbon emissions. We also have to keep a whole lot of wild birds alive right now. We need to combat the extinctions that are threatened in the present, work to reduce the many hazards that are decimating North American bird populations, and invest in large-scale, intelligently conceived conservation efforts, particularly those designed to allow for climate change. These aren't the only things that people who care about birds should be doing. But it only makes sense *not* to do them if the problem of global warming demands the full resources of every single nature-loving group.

little tragicomedy of climate ac-**A**tivism is its shifting of goalposts. Ten years ago, we were told that we had ten years to take the kind of drastic actions needed to prevent global temperatures from rising more than two degrees Celsius in this century. Today we hear, from some of the very same activists, that we still have ten years. In reality, our actions now would need to be even more drastic than they would have ten years ago, because further gigatons of carbon have accumulated in the atmosphere. At the rate we're going, we'll use up our entire emissions allowance for the century before we're even halfway through it. Meanwhile, the actions that many governments now propose are less drastic than what they proposed ten years ago.

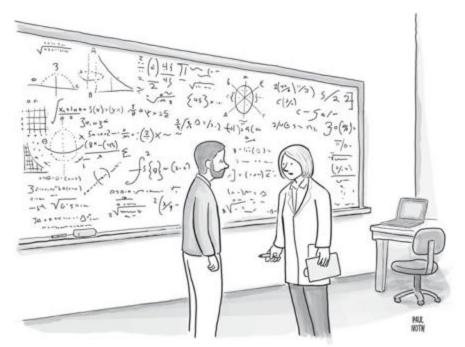
A book that does justice to the full tragedy and weird comedy of climate change is "Reason in a Dark Time," by the philosopher Dale Jamieson. Ordinarily, I avoid books on the subject, but a friend recommended it to me last summer, and I was intrigued by its subtitle, "Why the Struggle Against Climate Change Failed—And What It Means for Our Future"; by the word "failed" in particular, the past tense of it. I started reading and couldn't stop.

Jamieson, an observer and participant at climate conferences since the early nineties, begins with an overview of humanity's response to the largest collective-action problem it has ever faced. In the twenty-three years since the Rio Earth Summit, at which hopes for a global agreement ran high, not only have carbon emissions not decreased; they've increased steeply. In Copenhagen, in 2009, President Obama was merely ratifying a fait accompli when he declined to commit the United States to binding targets for reductions. Unlike Bill Clinton, Obama was frank

about how much action the American political system could deliver on climate change: none. Without the United States, which is the world's second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, a global agreement isn't global, and other countries have little incentive to sign it. Basically, America has veto power, and we've exercised it again and again.

The reason the American political system can't deliver action isn't simply that fossil-fuel corporations sponsor denialists and buy elections, as many progressives suppose. Even for people who accept the fact of global warming, the problem can be framed in many different ways—a crisis in global governance, a market failure, a technological challenge, a matter of social justice, and so on-each of which argues for a different expensive solution. A problem like this (a "wicked problem" is the technical term) will frustrate almost any country, and particularly the United States, where government is designed to be both weak and responsive to its citizens. Unlike the progressives who see a democracy perverted by moneyed interests, Jamieson suggests that America's inaction on climate change is the *result* of democracy. A good democracy, after all, acts in the interests of its citizens, and it's precisely the citizens of the major carbonemitting democracies who benefit from cheap gasoline and global trade, while the main costs of our polluting are borne by those who have no vote: poorer countries, future generations, other species. The American electorate, in other words, is rationally selfinterested. According to a survey cited by Jamieson, more than sixty per cent of Americans believe that climate change will harm other species and future generations, while only thirty-two per cent believe that it will harm them personally.

Shouldn't our responsibility to other people, both living and not yet born, compel us to take radical action on climate change? The problem here is that it makes no difference to the climate whether any individual, myself included, drives to work or rides a bike. The scale of greenhouse-gas emissions is so vast, the mechanisms by which these emissions affect the climate so nonlinear, and the effects so widely



"Sorry, Josh, but I need to stay in and work on my Theory of Everything but Josh."

dispersed in time and space that no specific instance of harm could ever be traced back to my 0.0000001-percent contribution to emissions. I may abstractly fault myself for emitting way more than the global per-capita average. But if I calculate the average annual quota required to limit global warming to two degrees this century I find that simply maintaining a typical American single-family home exceeds it in two weeks. Absent any indication of direct harm, what makes intuitive moral sense is to live the life I was given, be a good citizen, be kind to the people near me, and conserve as well as I reasonably can.

Jamieson's larger contention is that climate change is different in category from any other problem the world has ever faced. For one thing, it deeply confuses the human brain, which evolved to focus on the present, not the far future, and on readily perceivable movements, not slow and probabilistic developments. (When Jamieson notes that "against the background of a warming world, a winter that would not have been seen as anomalous in the past is viewed as unusually cold, thus as evidence that a warming is not occurring," you don't know whether to laugh or to

cry for our brains.) The great hope of the Enlightenment—that human rationality would enable us to transcend our evolutionary limitations—has taken a beating from wars and genocides, but only now, on the problem of climate change, has it foundered altogether.

I'd expected to be depressed by "Reason in a Dark Time," but I wasn't. Part of what's mesmerizing about climate change is its vastness across both space and time. Jamieson, by elucidating our past failures and casting doubt on whether we'll ever do any better, situates it within a humanely scaled context. "We are constantly told that we stand at a unique moment in human history and that this is the last chance to make a difference," he writes in his introduction. "But every point in human history is unique, and it is always the last chance to make some particular difference."

This was the context in which the word "nothing," applied to the difference that some Minnesotan bird-lovers were trying to make, so upset me. It's not that we shouldn't care whether global temperatures rise two degrees or four this century, or whether the oceans rise twenty inches or twenty feet; the differences matter immensely. Nor

should we fault any promising effort, by foundations or N.G.O.s or governments, to mitigate global warming or adapt to it. The question is whether *everyone* who cares about the environment is obliged to make climate the overriding priority. Does it make any practical or moral sense, when the lives and the livelihoods of millions of people are at risk, to care about a few thousand warblers colliding with a stadium?

To answer the question, it's important to acknowledge that drastic planetary overheating is a done deal. Even in the nations most threatened by flooding or drought, even in the countries most virtuously committed to alternative energy sources, no head of state has ever made a commitment to leaving any carbon in the ground. Without such a commitment, "alternative" merely means "additional"—postponement of human catastrophe, not prevention. The Earth as we now know it resembles a patient whose terminal cancer we can choose to treat either with disfiguring aggression or with palliation and sympathy. We can dam every river and blight every landscape with biofuel agriculture, solar farms, and wind turbines, to buy some extra years of moderated warming. Or we can settle for a shorter life of higher quality, protecting the areas where wild animals and plants are hanging on, at the cost of slightly hastening the human catastrophe. One advantage of the latter approach is that, if a miracle cure like fusion energy should come along, there might still be some intact ecosystems for it to save.

Choosing to preserve nature at potential human expense would be morally more unsettling if nature still had the upper hand. But we live in the Anthropocene now-in a world ever more of our own making. Near the end of Jamieson's chapter on ethics, he poses the question of whether it's a good thing or a bad thing that the arcadian Manhattan of 1630, lushly forested and teeming with fish and birds, became the modern Manhattan of the High Line and the Metropolitan Museum. People will give different answers. The point is that the change occurred and can't be undone, as global warming can't be undone. We were bequeathed a world of goods and bads

DEEP LANE

November and this road's tunnel of soft fire draws you forward, as it descends, as if you were moving toward—

radical completion, some encompassment? Dark kindness woven in the fabric of the afternoon.

And because you've held within your own veins another passage of fire—obliterating mercy—not these lit-up leaf clouds

but a hot wire stealing into the deepest chambers of the night you love the way the asphalt lifts

then hurries down toward Deep Lane. The fire road inside is only that road once;

though desire sends you back there again and again, it won't be that one you're on, and thus you want all the harder.

So let this road take you, autumn's enchanted boy lifted into the wet-yellow lamps of the maples;

taken up by that fleeting light, let your trophies fall to the rain, let the lean of the motorbike

by our forebears, and we'll bequeath a world of different goods and bads to our descendants. We've always been not only universal despoilers but brilliant adapters; climate change is just the same old story writ larger. The only self-inflicted existential threat to our species is nuclear war.

The story that is genuinely new is that we're causing mass extinctions. Not everyone cares about wild animals, but the people who consider them an irreplaceable, non-monetizable good have a positive ethical argument to make on their behalf. It's the same argument that Rachel Carson made in "Silent Spring," the book that ignited the modern environmental movement. Carson did warn of the dangers of pollution to human beings, but the moral center of her book was implicit in its title: Are we really O.K. with eliminat-

ing birds from the world? The dangers of carbon pollution today are far greater than those of DDT, and climate change may indeed be, as the National Audubon Society says, the foremost long-term threat to birds. But I already know that we can't prevent global warming by changing our light bulbs. I still want to do something.

In "Annie Hall," when the young Alvy Singer stopped doing his homework, his mother took him to a psychiatrist. It turned out that Alvy had read that the universe is expanding, which would surely lead to its breaking apart some day, and to him this was an argument for not doing his homework: "What's the point?" Under the shadow of vast global problems and vast global remedies, smaller-scale actions on behalf of nature can seem similarly meaningless. But Alvy's mother

carry you down the moraine, across the rising chill from the fields, on into town: warm light, voices, a meal in the tavern's golden cave.

You won't be riding that other road much again, but this one: the kind man's dark leather back in front of you, the cycle's center of gravity

sinking lower, the delicious clay-cold of the field between here and home rising up, scent of hay, of animals and ruin. He knows

you would just as soon stay, but lucky he's not here for that. He ferries you home, maybe every night of your life.

Or that's what you wish he could do, though you know it's you leaning against him that makes your mutual direction.

Every night a little like the one he came home late, happy, from the leather bar, and you in your welling up out of sleep said, I have a lake in me,

and he looked at you closely, with a generous, unflinching scrutiny, undeceived, loving, as clear a gaze as anyone had ever brought to you, and he said, You do.

—Mark Doty

was having none of it. "You're here in Brooklyn!" she said. "Brooklyn is not expanding!" It all depends on what we mean by meaning.

limate change shares many attri- butes of the economic system that's accelerating it. Like capitalism, it is transnational, unpredictably disruptive, self-compounding, and inescapable. It defies individual resistance, creates big winners and big losers, and tends toward global monoculture—the extinction of difference at the species level, a monoculture of agenda at the institutional level. It also meshes nicely with the tech industry, by fostering the idea that only tech, whether through the efficiencies of Uber or some masterstroke of geoengineering, can solve the problem of greenhouse-gas emissions. As a narrative, climate change is

almost as simple as "Markets are efficient." The story can be told in fewer than a hundred and forty characters: We're taking carbon that used to be sequestered and putting it in the atmosphere, and unless we stop we're fucked.

Conservation work, in contrast, is novelistic. No two places are alike, and no narrative is simple. When I travelled to Peru last November to see the work of a Peruvian-American partnership, the Amazon Conservation Association, my first stop was at a small indigenous community in the highlands east of Cuzco. With Amazon Conservation's help, the community is reforesting Andean slopes, suppressing forest fires, and developing a business in a local legume called *tarwi*, which can thrive on degraded land and is popular enough in Cuzco

to be profitable. In an old and dusty and dirt-floored building, women from the community served me a lunch of tarwi stew and dense, sweet tarwi bread. After lunch, in a neighboring courtyard, I toured a nursery of native tree saplings that the community will hand-plant on steep slopes, to fight erosion and improve local water quality. I then visited a nearby community that has pledged to leave its forested land intact and is operating an experimental organic farm. The scale of the farm is small, but to the community it means clear streams and self-sustenance, and to Amazon Conservation it represents a model for other communities. The regional and municipal governments have money from petroleum and mining royalties, and could spend it revitalizing the highlands according to the model. "We're not jealous," Amazon Conservation's Peruvian director, Daniela Pogliani, told me. "If the government wants to take our ideas and take the credit, we have no problem with it."

In an era of globalism of every sort, a good conservation project has to meet new criteria. The project has to be large, because biodiversity won't survive in a habitat fragmented by palm-oil plantations or gas drilling. The project has to respect and accommodate the people already living in and around it. (Carbon emissions have rendered meaningless the ideal of a wilderness untouched by man; the new ideal is "wildness," which is measured not by isolation from disturbance but by the diversity of organisms that can complete their life cycles.) And the project needs to be resilient with respect to climate change, either by virtue of its size or by incorporating altitudinal gradients or multiple microclimates.

The highlands are important to the Amazon because they're a source of its water and because, as the planet heats up, lower-elevation species will shift their ranges upslope. The focal point for Amazon Conservation is Peru's Manú National Park, a swath of lower-elevation rain forest larger than Connecticut. The park, which is home to indigenous groups that shun contact with the outside world, has full legal protection from encroachment, but illegal encroachment is endemic in



"O.K., now—on three, I'm going to toss a second job in there!"

the parks of tropical countries. What Amazon Conservation is attempting to do for Manú, besides expanding its upslope potential and protecting its watershed, is to strengthen the buffer on the flanks of the park, which are threatened by logging, slash-and-burn farming, and a boom in wildcat gold mining in the region of Madre de Dios. The project aspires to be a protective belt of small reserves, self-sustaining community lands, and larger conservation "concessions" on state-owned land.

On the fifty-five-mile road down from the highlands, it's possible to see nearly six hundred species of bird. The road follows an ancient track once used to transport coca leaves from the lowlands to pre-Columbian highland civilizations. On trails near the road, Amazon Conservation researchers peaceably coexist with modern-day

coca traffickers. The road bottoms out near Villa Carmen, a former hacienda that now has an educational center, a lodge for ecotourists, and an experimental farm where a substance called biochar is being tested. Biochar, which is manufactured by kiln-burning woody refuse and pulverizing the charred result, allows carbon to be sequestered in farm fields and is a lowcost way to enrich poor soil. It offers local farmers an alternative to slashand-burn agriculture, wherein forest is destroyed for cropland, the soil is quickly exhausted, and more forest has to be destroyed. Even a wealthy country like Norway, seeking to offset its carbon emissions and to assuage its guilt, can't save a rain forest simply by buying up land and putting a fence around it, because no fence is strong enough to resist social forces. The way to save a forest is to give the people who live in it alternatives to cutting it down.

At the indigenous village of Santa Rosa de Huacaria, near Villa Carmen, the community's cacique, Don Alberto, gave me a tour of the fish farm and fish hatchery that Amazon Conservation has helped it develop. Large-scale fish farming is ecologically problematic in other parts of the world, but smaller-scale operations in the Amazon, using native fish species, are among the most sustainable and least destructive sources of animal protein. Huacaria's operation provides meat for its thirty-nine families and surplus fish that it can sell for cash. Over lunch—farmed paco fire-roasted with yucca inside segments of bamboo, with heliconia-leaf plugs at each end—Don Alberto held forth movingly on the effects of climate change that he'd seen in his lifetime. The sun felt hotter now, he said. Some of his people had developed skin cancer, unheard of in the past, and the larvae of a palm-tree parasite, which the community had traditionally eaten to control diabetes and stimulate their immune systems, had vanished. Nevertheless, he was committed to the forest. Amazon Conservation is helping the community expand its land title and develop its own partnership with the national park. Don Alberto told me that a natural-medicine company had offered him a retainer and a jet in which to fly around the world and lecture on traditional healing, and that he'd turned it down.

The most striking thing about Amazon Conservation's work is the smallness of its constituent parts. There are the eight female paco from which a season's worth of eggs are taken, the humbleness of the plastic tanks in which the hatchlings live. There are the conical piles of dirt that highland women sit beside and fill short plastic tubes in which to plant tree seedlings. There are the simple wooden sheds that Amazon Conservation builds for indigenous Brazil-nut harvesters to shelter the nuts from rain, and that can make the difference between earning a living income and having to cut or leave the forest. And there is the method for taking a bird

census in a lowland forest: you walk a hundred metres, stopping to look and listen, and then walk another hundred metres. At every turn, the smallness contrasts with the vastness of climatechange projects—the mammoth wind turbines, the horizon-reaching solar farms, the globe-encircling clouds of reflective particles that geoengineers envision. The difference in scale creates a difference in the kind of meaning that actions have for the people performing them. The meaning of climate-related actions, because they produce no discernible result, is necessarily eschatological; they refer to a Judgment Day we're hoping to postpone. The mode of meaning of conservation in the Amazon is Franciscan: you're helping something you love, something right in front of you, and you can see the results.

In much the way that developed nations, having long contributed disproportionately to carbon emissions, now expect developing nations to share the burden of reducing them, the rich but biotically poor countries of Europe and North America need tropical countries to do the work of safeguarding global biodiversity. Many of these countries are still recovering from colonialism, however, and have more urgent troubles. Very little of the deforestation of the Brazilian Amazon, for example, is being done by wealthy people. The deforesters are poor families displaced from more fecund regions where capital-intensive agribusinesses grow soybeans for Chinese tofu and eucalyptus pulp for American disposable diapers. The gold-mining boom in Madre de Dios is not only an ecological catastrophe but a human disaster, with widespread reports of mercury poisoning and human trafficking, but Peruvian state and federal governments have yet to put an end to it, because the miners make much better money than they could in the impoverished regions from which they've emigrated. Besides tailoring its work to the needs and capacities of local people, a group like Amazon Conservation has to negotiate an extremely complicated political landscape.

In Costa Rica, I met a seventy-

six-year-old tropical biologist, Daniel Janzen, who has spent nearly half his life doing just that. Janzen and his wife, Winnie Hallwachs, are the architects of perhaps the most audacious and successful conservation project in the New World tropics, the Area Conservación de Guanacaste (A.C.G.). Janzen and Hallwachs began working on the project, in 1985, with many advantages. Costa Rica was a stable democracy whose system of parks and reserves comprised one quarter of its land area and was internationally admired; the northern dry-forest region of Guanacaste, the site of the project, was remote, sparsely populated, and unattractive to agribusiness. That Janzen and Hallwachs created a reserve that meets the new criteria—it is huge, has good relations with surrounding communities, and encompasses a marine reserve, the dry slopes of a volcanic cordillera, and Caribbean rain forest—is nonetheless remarkable, because they were two unwealthy scientists and the politics never ceased to be complicated.

Costa Rica famously has no army, but its park administration has been organized like one. Headquartered in the capital, San José, it freely rotates its guards and other personnel throughout the system, with the parks functioning essentially as territories to be defended from armies of potential encroachers. Janzen and some farsighted Costa Rican policymakers recognized that, in a country where economic opportunities were limited, the amount of protected land enormous, and funding for protection strictly finite, defending parks filled with timber and game and minerals was like defending mansions in a ghetto. The A.C.G. experimented with a new approach: the national parks and the reserves within it were exempted from the park administration's policy of rotation, which allowed their personnel to put down roots and develop allegiance to the land and the conservation concept, and all employees, including the police, were expected to do meaningful conservation or scientific work.

In the early years, this work often consisted of fighting fires. Much of the present-day A.C.G. was once ranchland covered with Africanized grasses. Using money raised with the help of the Nature Conservancy and the Swedish and Costa Rican governments, and from passing a hat after his lectures in America, Janzen was able to buy up huge chunks of pasture and damaged forest between the two existing national parks. After the cattle were removed, wildfires became the main threat to the project. Janzen experimented with planting seedlings of native tree species, but he quickly concluded that natural reforestation, with seeds carried by wind and animal droppings, worked better. Once the new forest took hold, and the fire risk diminished, he developed a more ambitious mission for the A.C.G.'s employees: creating a complete inventory of the estimated three hundred and seventy-five thousand plant and animal species that occur within its boundaries.

Borrowing from the term "paralegal," Janzen coined the word "parataxonomist" for the Guanacasteans he hired. They lack university degrees, but after a period of intensive training they're able to do real scientific work. They walk the dry Pacific-slope forest and the wet Caribbean forest, collect specimens, and mount them and take tissue samples for DNA analysis. There are currently thirty-four parataxonomists, whom Janzen is able to pay respectable salaries with grant money, interest from a small endowment, and dogged fund-raising. Janzen told me that the parataxonomists are as highly motivated and eager to learn as his best graduate students. (He teaches biology at the University of Pennsylvania.) I saw one team early on a Saturday morning collecting an assortment of leaves for the caterpillars it was raising in plastic bags, another team setting out on a Sunday morning to scour the woods.

Of the three new criteria for successful conservation projects, integration with surrounding communities is the most difficult to meet. Janzen's taxonomy endeavor serves this goal in several ways. Most basically, for Costa Ricans to care about biodiversity—their country, which covers 0.03 per cent of the Earth's land surface, contains four per cent of its species—they

have to know what it consists of. Biodiversity is an abstraction, but the hundreds of drawers of pinned and named Guanacastean moth specimens, in an air-conditioned room at Santa Rosa National Park, are not. Hands-on science, the specific story that each toxic plant and each parasitic wasp has to tell, also provides a focus for the Guanacastean schoolchildren whom the A.C.G. has been hosting for thirty years. If you spent a week in the dry forest as a child, examining chrysalides and ocelot droppings, you might, as an adult, see the forest as something other than a purely economic resource. Finally, and perhaps most important, the parataxonomists create a sense of local ownership. Some of them are husband-and-wife teams, and many live at the research stations that dot the A.C.G., where they exert a more powerful protective influence than armed guards ever could, because their neighbors are their friends and family. During my days at Guanacaste, I passed the station at the entrance to Santa Rosa many times and never saw a guard. By Janzen's account, poaching and illegal logging are much rarer in the A.C.G. than in other, traditionally guarded Costa Rican parks.

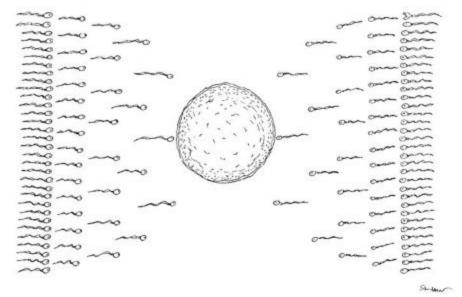
Janzen and Hallwachs spend half the year in a tiny, cluttered hut near Santa Rosa's headquarters. Deer, agoutis, magpie-jays, wasps, and monkeys frequent the bowls of water in front of their hut. Over the years, they've kept a porcupine and a pygmy owl as rescue pets; Janzen remarked to me wistfully that he wished it were possible to have a pet rattlesnake. White-bearded and shirtless, wearing only sneakers and dirty green cotton pants, he looks as though he had walked out of a Conrad novel. Hallwachs, who is a tropical ecologist, is younger, more emollient, and skilled at converting Janzen's scientific rationality into conventional social currency.

The forest in Santa Rosa seemed desperately dry to me, even for a dry forest in the dry season. Hallwachs pointed to the cloud cover on the volcanoes and said that during the past fifteen years it has steadily moved upslope, a harbinger of climate change. "I used to win cases of beer betting on the date the rains would come," Janzen said. "It was always May 15th, and now you don't know when they're going to come." He added that insect populations in Guanacaste had collapsed in the four decades he'd been studying them, and that he'd thought of describing the collapse in a paper, but what would be the point? It would only depress people. The loss of insect species is already harming the birds that eat them and the plants that need pollination, and the losses will surely continue as the planet warms. But to Janzen the warming doesn't obviate the A.C.G. "If you had the only Rembrandt in the world," he said, "and somebody came and slashed it with a knife—would you throw it away?"

My visit coincided with the news of a breakthrough in technology for making ethanol from cellulose. From a climate perspective, the lure of efficient biofuel production is irresistible, but to Janzen it looks like another disaster. The richest land in Costa Rica is already given over to monocultural agribusiness. What would happen to the country if second-growth forest could fuel its cars? As long as mitigating climate change trumps all other environmental concerns, no landscape on earth is safe. Like globalism, climatism alienates. Americans today live far from the ecological damage that their consumption habits cause, and even if future consumers are more enlightened about carbon footprints, and fill their tanks with certified green fuel, they'll still be alienated. Only an appreciation of nature as a collection of specific threatened habitats, rather than as an abstract thing that is "dying," can avert the complete denaturing of the world.

Guanacaste is already the last significant expanse of Pacific dry forest in Central America. To preserve even some of the species unique to it, the reserve has to last forever. "It's like terrorism," Janzen said. "We have to succeed every day, the terrorists have to succeed only once." The questions that he and Hallwachs ask about the future have little to do with global warming. They wonder how to make the A.C.G. financially self-sustaining, and how to root its mission permanently in Costa Rican society, and how to insure that its water resources aren't all drawn off to irrigate cropland, and how to prepare for future Costa Rican politicians who want to level it for cellulosic ethanol.

The question that most foreign visitors to Guanacaste ask is how its model can be applied to other centers of biodiversity in the tropics. The answer is that it can't be. Our economic system encourages monocultural thinking: there exists an optimal solution, a best conservation product, and once we identify it we can scale it up and sell it universally. As the contrast between Amazon Conservation and the A.C.G. suggests, preserving biological diversity requires a corresponding



"I'm just hoping to make it to the Final Four."

diversity of approach. Good programs—the Carr Foundation's Gorongosa Restoration Project in Mozambique, Island Conservation's re-wilding of islands in the Pacific and the Caribbean, WildEarth Guardians' fight to save the sagelands of the American West, EuroNatur's blending of cultural and biological conservation in southeastern Europe, to name a few—not only act locally but, by necessity, think locally as well.

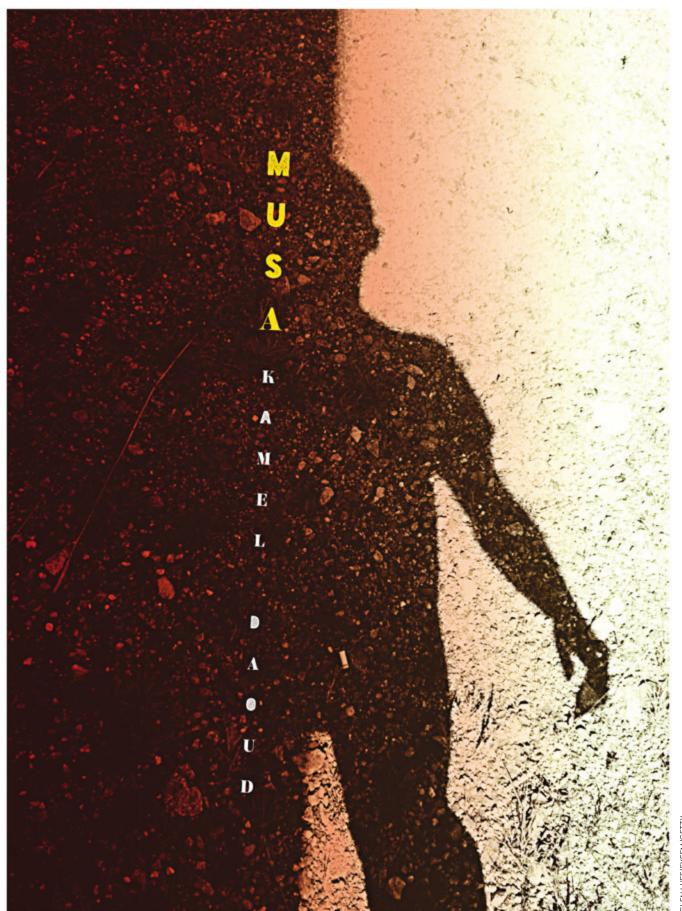
During my time with Janzen, he rarely mentioned other projects. What concerns him is what he loves concretely: the specific dry-forest hunting grounds that he uses as a tropical field biologist, the unprivileged Costa Ricans who work for the A.C.G. and live near its borders. Sitting in a chair outside his forest hut, he was an unstoppable font of story. There was the story of Oliver North's airstrip for the contras, on the Santa Elena peninsula, and how Santa Elena became part of the A.C.G. The story of Janzen's discovery that dry-forest moth species spend part of their life cycle in humid forest, and how this led him and Hallwachs to expand the scope of their already ambitious project. And the story of the thousand truckloads of orange peel that the A.C.G. took off the hands of an orange-juice plant in exchange for fourteen hundred hectares of prime forest, and how a mischief-making environmentalist then sued the juice company for illegally dumping the peels on public land, even though, by the time the suit was settled, they'd decayed into a rich, reforestation-promoting loam. The story of how Janzen and Hallwachs learned to do business with multiple landowners simultaneously, making allor-nothing offers for bundles of properties, to avoid being taken hostage by an individual holdout. The story of the landowner who invested the proceeds of his sale of ranchland in irrigation for sugarcane production outside the A.C.G.—an example of conservation's reversal of geographical entropy, its sorting of mixed-used land into areas of stringent protection and intensive exploitation. The story of the A.C.G.'s redesignation of its schoolteachers as "secretaries," because "schoolteacher" wasn't a rec-



ognized civil-service position in the Ministry of Environment, Energy, and Telecommunications.

In 1985, when Janzen and Hallwachs set out to create the A.C.G., with no training or experience in conservation work, they couldn't have imagined any of these stories. Guanacaste became the thing that happened to them, the life they chose to live. It may be true, of course, that "where there's life there's death," as Janzen is fond of saying, and I did wonder if the vision of a climate-denatured planet, a world of switchgrass fields and eucalyptus plantations, is secretly appealing to human beings, because, having so much less life in it, it would have so much less death. Certainly there was death all around me in the forest, palpably more death than in a suburb or a farm field—jaguars killing deer, deer killing saplings, wasps killing caterpillars, boas killing birds, and birds killing everything imaginable, according to their specialty. But this was because it was a living forest.

From a global perspective, it can seem that the future holds not only my own death but a second, larger death of the familiar world. Across the river from the lowest-lying of Amazon Conservation's research stations, Los Amigos, are miles and miles of forest ripped apart by gold miners. The A.C.G. is surrounded by agribusiness and coastal development that its existence has served to consolidate. But within Los Amigos are quetzals, tinamous, trumpeters, and everything else that their ongoing presence represents. Within the A.C.G. is a forest that didn't exist thirty years ago, with hundred-foot trees and five species of large cat, sea turtles digging their nests by the ocean, and flocks of parakeets sociably feasting on the seeds of fruiting trees. The animals may not be able to thank us for allowing them to live, and they certainly wouldn't do the same thing for us if our positions were reversed. But it's we, not they, who need life to have meaning. ♦



usa was my older brother. His head seemed to strike the clouds. He was quite tall, yes, and his body was thin and knotty from hunger and the strength that comes from anger. He had an angular face, big hands that protected me, and hard eyes, because our ancestors had lost their land. But when I think about it I believe that he already loved us then the way the dead do, with no useless words and a look in his eyes that came from the hereafter. I have only a few pictures of him in my head, but I want to describe them to you carefully. For example, the day he came home early from the neighborhood market, or maybe from the port, where he worked as a handyman and a porter, toting, dragging, lifting, sweating. Anyway, that day he came upon me while I was playing with an old tire, and he put me on his shoulders and told me to hold on to his ears, as if his head were a steering wheel. I remember the joy I felt as he rolled the tire along and made a sound like a motor. His smell comes back to me, too, a persistent mingling of rotten vegetables, sweat, and breath. Another picture in my memory is from the day of Eid one year. Musa had given me a hiding the day before for some stupid thing I'd done, and now we were both embarrassed. It was a day of forgiveness and he was supposed to kiss me, but I didn't want him to lose face and lower himself by apologizing to me, not even in God's name. I also remember his gift for immobility, the way he could stand stock still on the threshold of our house, facing the neighbors' wall, holding a cigarette and the cup of black coffee our mother brought him.

Our father had disappeared long ago and existed now in fragments in the rumors we heard from people who claimed to have run into him in France. Only Musa could hear his voice. He'd give Musa commands in his dreams, and Musa would relay them to us. My brother had seen our father just once since he left, and from such a distance that he wasn't even sure it was him. As a child, I learned how to distinguish the days with rumors from the days without. When Musa heard people talking about my father, he'd come home all feverish gestures and burning eyes, and then he and Mama would have long, whispered conversations that ended in heated arguments. I was excluded from those, but I got the gist: for some obscure reason, my brother held a grudge against Mama, and she defended herself in a way that was even more obscure. Those were unsettling days and nights, filled with anger, and I lived in fear at the idea that Musa might leave us, too. But he'd always return at dawn, drunk, oddly proud of his rebellion, seemingly endowed with renewed vigor. Then he'd sober up and fade away. All he wanted to do was sleep, and in this way my mother would get him under her control again.

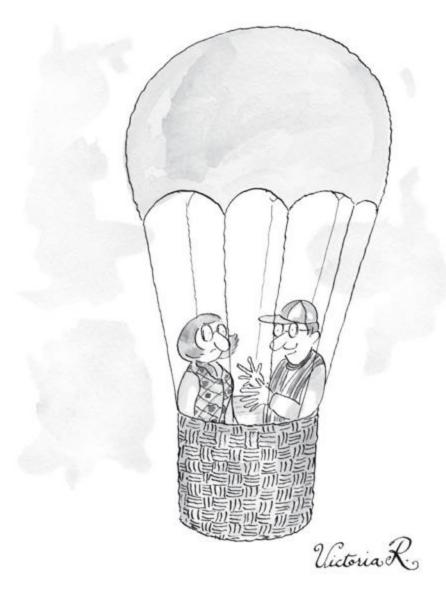
I have some pictures in my head they're all I can offer you. A cup of coffee, some cigarette butts, his espadrilles, Mama crying and then recovering quickly to smile at a neighbor who'd come to borrow some tea or spices, moving from distress to courtesy so fast that it made me doubt her sincerity, as young as I was. Everything revolved around Musa, and Musa revolved around our father, whom I never knew and who left me nothing but our family name. Do you know what we were called in those days? Uled elassas, the sons of the guardian. Of the watchman, to be more precise. My father had worked as a night watchman in a factory where they made I don't know what. One night, he disappeared. And that's all. That's the story I was told. It happened in the nineteen-thirties, right after I was born.

So Musa was a god for me, a simple god of few words. His thick beard and powerful arms made him seem like a giant who could have wrung the neck of any soldier in an ancient Pharaoh's army. Which was why, on the day we learned of his death and the circumstances surrounding it, I didn't feel sad or angry at first; instead, I felt disappointed and offended, as if someone had insulted me. My brother was capable of parting the sea, and yet he died in insignificance, like a bit player, on a beach that is no longer there, beside the waves that should have made him famous forever.

As a child, I was allowed to hear only one story at night, only one deceptively wonderful tale. It was the story of Musa, my murdered brother, which took a different form each time, according to my mother's mood. In my memory, those nights are associated with rainy winters, with the dim light of the oil lamp in our hovel, and with Mama's murmuring voice. Such nights didn't come often, only when

we were short on food, when it was cold, and, maybe, when Mama felt even more like a widow than usual. Oh, stories die, you know, and I can't remember exactly what the poor woman told me, but she knew how to summon up unlikely things, tales of hand-to-hand combat between Musa, the invisible giant, and the gaouri, the roumi, the big fat Frenchman, the obese thief of sweat and land. And so, in our imaginations, my brother Musa was commissioned to perform different tasks: repay a blow, avenge an insult, recover a piece of confiscated land, collect a paycheck. All of a sudden, this legendary Musa acquired a horse and a sword and the aura of a spirit come back from the dead to redress injustice. And, well, you know how it goes. When he was alive, he had a reputation as a quick-tempered man with a fondness for impromptu boxing matches. Most of Mama's tales, however, were chronicles of Musa's last day, which was also, in a way, the first day of his immortality. Mama could narrate the events of that day in such staggering detail that they almost came to life. She never described a murder and a death; instead, she'd evoke a fantastic transformation, one that turned a simple young man from one of the poorer quarters of Algiers into an invincible, long-awaited hero, a kind of savior. The details would change. In some versions of the story, Musa had left the house a little earlier than usual, awakened by a prophetic dream or a terrifying voice that had pronounced his name. In others, he'd answered the call of some friends—uled elhuma, sons of the neighborhood—idle young men interested in skirts, cigarettes, and scars. An obscure discussion ensued and resulted in Musa's death. I'm not sure: Mama had a thousand and one stories, and the truth meant little to me at that age. What was most important at those moments was my almost sensual closeness with Mama, our silent reconciliation during the night to come. The next morning, everything was always back in its place, my mother in one world and me in another.

What can I tell you, Mr. Investigator, about a crime committed in a book? I don't know what happened on that particular day, in that gruesome summer, between six o'clock in the morning and two in the afternoon, the hour of Musa's death. And, in any case, after Musa was killed



"When is it ever the right time to ask for a divorce?"

nobody came around to question us. There was no serious investigation. I have a hard time remembering what I myself did that day. In the morning, the usual neighborhood characters were awake and on the street. Down at one end, we had Tawi and his sons. Tawi was a heavyset fellow. Dragged his bad left leg, had a nagging cough, smoked a lot. And, early each morning, it was his habit to step outside and pee on a wall, as blithely as you please. Everybody knew him, because his ritual was so unvarying that he served as a clock; the broken cadence of his footsteps and his cough were the first signs that the new day had arrived on our street. Farther up on the right, there was El-Hadj, "the pilgrim"—which he was by genealogy, not because he'd made the trip to Mecca. El-Hadj was just his given name. He, too, was the silent type. His main occupations seemed to be striking his mother and eying his neighbors with a permanent air of defiance. On the near corner of the adjacent alley, a Moroccan had a café called El-Blidi. His sons were liars and petty thieves, capable of stealing all the fruit off every tree. They'd invented a game: they would throw matches into the sidewalk gutters, where the wastewater ran, and then follow the course of those matches. They never tired of doing that. I also remember an old woman, Taïbia, big, fat, childless, and very temperamental. There was something unsettling and even a little voracious in the way she looked at us—other women's offspring—that made us giggle nervously. We were just a little collection of lice on the back of the huge geological animal that was the city, with its thousand alleys.

So, on that particular day, nothing unusual. Even Mama, who loved omens and was sensitive to spirits, failed to detect anything abnormal. A routine day, in short—women calling to one another, laundry hung out on the terraces, street venders. No one could have heard a gunshot from so far away, a shot fired downtown, on the beach. Not even at the devil's hour, two o'clock on a summer afternoon—the siesta hour. So, I repeat, nothing unusual. Later, of course, I thought about it and, little by little, I concluded that there had to be-among the thousand versions Mama offered, among her memory fragments and her still vivid intuitions—there had to be one version that was truer than the others.

By telling me so many implausible tales and outright lies, Mama eventually aroused my suspicions and put my own intuitions in order. I reconstructed the whole thing. Musa's frequent binges during that period, the scent floating in the air, his proud smile when he ran into his friends, their overserious, almost comical confabs, the way my brother had of playing with his knife and showing me his tattoos: Echedda fi Allah, "God is my support." "March or die" on his right shoulder. "Be quiet" on his left forearm, under a drawing of a broken heart. This was the only book that Musa wrote. Shorter than a last sigh, just three sentences inscribed on the oldest paper in the world, his own skin. I remember his tattoos the way most people remember their first picture book. Other details? Oh, I don't know, his overalls, his espadrilles, his prophet's beard, his big hands, which tried to hold on to our father's ghost, and his history with a nameless, honorless woman.

Ah! The mystery woman! Provided that she existed at all. I know only her first name; at least, I presume it was hers. My brother had spoken it in his sleep that night, the night before his death: Zubida. A sign? Maybe. In any case, the day Mama and I left the neighborhood forever—Mama had decided to get away from Algiers and the sea—I'm sure I saw a woman staring at us. A very intense stare. She was wearing a short skirt and

tacky stockings, and she'd done her hair the way the movie stars did in those days: although she was quite obviously a brunette, her hair was dyed blond. "Zubida forever," ha-ha! Perhaps my brother had those words tattooed somewhere on his body as well—I don't know for sure. But I am sure that it was her that day.

It was early in the morning. We were setting out, Mama and I, leaving the house for good, and there she was, holding a little red purse, staring at us from some distance away. I can still see her lips and her huge eyes, which seemed to be asking us for something. I'm almost certain that it was her. At the time, I wanted it to be her, and I decided that it was, because that added something to the tale of my brother's demise somehow. I needed Musa to have had an excuse, a reason. Without realizing it, I rejected the absurdity of his death; I needed a story to give him a shroud. Well, then. I pulled Mama by her haik, so that she wouldn't see the woman. But she must have sensed something, because she made a horrible face and spat out a prodigiously vulgar insult. I turned around, but the woman had disappeared. And then we left.

I remember the road to our new home, in the village of Hadjout, the fields whose crops weren't destined for us, the naked sun, the other travellers on the dusty bus. The oil fumes nauseated me, but I loved the virile, almost comforting roar of the engine, like a kind of father that was snatching us, my mother and me, out of an enormous labyrinth of buildings, downtrodden people, shantytowns, dirty urchins, aggressive cops, and beaches fatal to Arabs. For the two of us, the city would always be the scene of the crime, the place where something pure and ancient was lost. Yes, Algiers, in my memory, is a dirty, corrupt creature, a dark, treacherous man-stealer.

Let's see, let me try to remember exactly....How did we first learn of Musa's death? I remember a kind of invisible cloud hovering over our street, and angry grownups talking loudly and gesticulating. At first, Mama told me that a *gaouri* had killed one of our neighbor's sons while he was trying to defend an Arab woman and her honor. But, during the night, anxiety got inside our house, and I think Mama began to realize the truth. So did I, probably. And

then, all of a sudden, I heard this long, low moan, swelling until it became immense, a huge mass of sound that destroyed our furniture and blew apart our walls and then the whole neighborhood and left me all alone. I remember starting to cry for no reason, just because everyone was looking at me. Mama had disappeared, and I was shoved outside, ejected by something more important than me, absorbed into some kind of collective disaster. Strange, don't you think? I told myself, confusedly, that this probably had to do with my father, that he was definitely dead this time, which made me sob twice as hard. It was a long night; nobody slept. A constant stream of people came to offer their condolences. The grownups spoke to me solemnly. When I couldn't understand what they were telling me, I contented myself with looking at their hard eyes, their shaking hands, and their shabby shoes. By the time dawn came, I was very hungry, and I fell asleep I don't know where. No matter how much I dig around in my memory, I have no recollection at all of that day and the next, except of the smell of couscous. The days blurred into an interminable single day, like a broad, deep valley I meandered through. The last day of a man's life doesn't exist. Outside of storybooks, there's no hope, nothing but soap bubbles bursting. That's the best proof of our absurd existence, my dear friend: no one is granted a final day, only an accidental interruption of life.

These days, my moment looks like her own mother, or maybe hese days, my mother's so old she her great-grandmother, or even her greatgreat-grandmother. Once we reach a certain age, time gives us the features of all our ancestors, combined in a soft jumble of reincarnations. And maybe that's what the next world is-an endless corridor where all your ancestors are lined up, one after another. They turn toward their living descendant and simply wait, without words, without movement, their patient eyes fixed on a date. I don't know my mother's age, just as she has no idea how old I am. Before Independence, people did without exact dates; the rhythms of life were marked by births, epidemics, food shortages, and so on. My grandmother died of typhus, an episode that by itself served to establish a calendar. My father left on a December 1st, and since then that date has been a reference point for measuring the temperature of the heart, so to speak.

You want the truth? I rarely go to see my mother nowadays. She lives in a house under a sky where a dead man and a lemon tree loiter. She spends her days sweeping every corner of that house in Hadjout, formerly known as Marengo, seventy kilometres from the capital. That was where I spent the second half of my childhood and part of my youth, before going to Algiers to learn a profession (government land administration) and then returning to Hadjout to practice it. We—my mother and I—had put as much distance as possible between us and the sound of breaking waves.

Let's take up the chronology again. We left Algiers—on that famous day when I was sure I'd spotted Zubida and went to stay with an uncle and his family, who barely tolerated us. We lived in a hovel before being kicked out by the very people who'd taken us in. Then we lived in a little shed on the threshing floor of a colonial farm, where we both had jobs, Mama as a maid and I as an errand boy. The boss was this obese guy from Alsace who ended up smothered in his own fat, I believe. People said that he used to torture slackers by sitting on their chests. They also said that he had a protruding Adam's apple because the body of an Arab he'd swallowed was lodged in his throat. I still have memories from that period: an old priest who sometimes brought us food, the jute sack my mother made into a kind of smock for me, the semolina dishes we'd eat on special occasions. I don't want to tell you about our troubles, because at that time they were a matter only of hunger, not of injustice. In the evening, we kids would play marbles, and if one of us didn't show up the following day that would mean that he was dead—and we'd keep on playing. It was a period of epidemics and famines. Rural life was hard. It revealed what the cities kept hidden—namely, that the country was starving to death. I was afraid, especially at night, of hearing the bleak sound of men's footsteps, men who knew that Mama had no protector. Those were nights of waking and watchfulness, which I spent glued to her side. I was well and truly the *uld el-assas*,

the night watchman's son and heir.

Strangely, we gravitated around Hadjout and the vicinity for years before we were able to settle down behind solid walls. Who knows how much cunning and patience it cost Mama to find us a house, the one she still lives in today? I don't. In any case, she figured out what the right move was: she got herself hired as a housekeeper and waited, with me perched on her back, for Independence. The truth of the matter is that the house had belonged to a family of settlers who left in a hurry, and we ended up taking it over during the first days of Independence. It's a three-room house with wallpapered walls, and in the courtyard a dwarf lemon tree that stares at the sky. There are two little sheds beside the house, and a wooden doorframe. I remember the vine that provided shade along the walls, and the strident peeping of the birds. Before we moved into the main house, Mama and I resided in an adjacent shack, which a neighbor uses as a grocery store today. You know, I don't like to remember that period. It's as if I were forced to beg for pity.

When I was fifteen, I found a job as a farm laborer. Work was rare, and the nearest farm was three kilometres from the village. Do you know how I got the job? I'm going to confess: one day I got up before dawn and I let the air out of another worker's bicycle tires so that I could show up earlier than he did and take his place. Yes, indeed, that's hunger for you! I don't want to play the victim, but it took us years to cross the dozen or so metres that separated our hovel from the settlers' house, years of tiny, fettered steps, as if we were slogging through mud or quicksand in a nightmare. I believe more than ten years passed before we finally got our hands on that house and declared it liberated: our property! Yes, yes, we acted like everybody else during the first days of freedom: we broke down the door, took the tableware and the candlesticks. But where was I? It's a long story, and I'm getting a bit lost.

After Musa's murder, while we were still living in Algiers, my mother converted her anger into a long, spectacular period of mourning that won her the sympathy of the neighbor women and a kind of legitimacy that allowed her to go out on the street, mingle with men,

work in other people's houses, sell spices, and do housework, without running the risk of being judged. Her femininity had died and, with it, men's suspicions. I saw little of her during that time. I'd spend entire days waiting for her while she walked all over the city, conducting her investigation into Musa's death, questioning people who knew him, recognized him, or had crossed his path for the last time in the course of that year, 1942. Some neighbor ladies kept me fed,



and the other children in the neighborhood showed me the respect you give to seriously ill or broken people. I found my status—as "the dead man's brother"—almost agreeable; in fact, I didn't begin to suffer from it until I was approaching adulthood, when I learned to read and realized what an unjust fate had befallen my brother, who died in a book.

After his passing, the way my time was structured changed. I lived my life in absolute freedom for exactly forty days. The funeral didn't take place until then, you see. The neighborhood imam must have found the whole thing disturbing. For Musa's body was never found, and missing persons rarely have funerals.... My mother looked for my brother everywhere—in the morgue, at the police station in Belcourt—and she knocked on every door. To no avail. Musa had vanished; he was absolutely, perfectly, incomprehensibly dead. There had been two of them in that place of sand and salt, him and his killer only. Of the murderer we knew almost nothing. He was el-roumi, the foreigner, "the stranger." People in the neighborhood showed my mother his picture in the newspaper, but for us he was just like all the other colonists who'd grown fat on so many stolen harvests. There was nothing special about him, except for the cigarette stuck in the corner of his mouth; his features were instantly forgotten, confused with those of his people.

My mother visited cemeteries, pestered my brother's former comrades. Her efforts were in vain, but they revealed her

talent for idle chatter, and her mourning period evolved into a surprising comedy, a marvellous act she put on and refined until it became a masterpiece. Virtually widowed for the second time, she turned her personal drama into a kind of business that required all who came near her to make an effort of compassion. She invented a range of illnesses in order to gather the whole tribe of female neighbors around her whenever she had so much as a migraine headache. She often pointed a finger at me as if I were an orphan, and she withdrew her affection from me very quickly, replacing it with the narrowed eyes of suspicion and the hard gaze of admonition. Oddly enough, I was treated like the dead brother, and Musa like a survivor whose coffee was prepared fresh at the end of the day, whose bed was made for him, and whose footsteps were listened for, even when he was coming from very far away, from downtown Algiers and the neighborhoods that were closed to us at the time. I was condemned to a secondary role because I had nothing in particular to offer. I felt guilty for being alive but also responsible for a life that wasn't my own. I was the guardian, the assas, like my father, watching over another body.

I also remember that weird funeral: crowds of people; discussions lasting well into the night; us children, attracted by the light bulbs and the many candles; and then an empty grave and a prayer for the departed. After the religious waiting period of forty days, Musa had been declared dead—swept away by the sea—and therefore, absurdly, the service that Islam prescribes for the drowned was performed. Then everyone left, except my mother and me.

It was morning. I was cold even under the blanket, shivering. Musa had been dead for weeks. I heard the outside sounds—a passing bicycle, old Tawi's coughing, the squeaking of chairs, the raising of iron shutters. In my head, every voice corresponded to a woman, a time of life, a concern, a mood, or even to the kind of wash that was going to be hung out that day. There was a knock at our door. Some women had come to visit Mama. I knew the script by heart: a silence, followed by sobs, then hugs and kisses; still more tears; then one of the women would lift the curtain that divided the room, look at me, smile

distractedly, and grab the coffee jar or something else. The scene continued until sometime around noon. Only in the afternoon, after the ritual of the scarf soaked in orange-flower water and wrapped around her head, after some interminable moaning and a long, very long silence, would Mama remember me and take me in her arms. But I knew that it was Musa she wanted to find there, not me. And I let her do it.

As I said, Musa's body was never found.

Consequently, my mother imposed on me a strict duty of reincarnation. For instance, as soon as I had grown a little, she made me wear my dead brother's clothes—his undershirts, his dress shirts, his shoes—even though they were still too big for me, and that went on until I wore them out. I was forbidden to wander away from her, to walk by myself, to sleep in unknown places, and, before we left Algiers, to venture anywhere near the beach. The sea was off-limits. Mama taught me to fear its mildest suctionso effectively that even today, when I'm walking along the shore, where the waves die, the sensation of the sand giving way under my feet feels like the beginning of drowning. Deep down, Mama wanted to believe that the water was the culprit, that the water had carried off her son's body. My body, therefore, became the only visible trace of her dead son, which likely explained my physical cowardice which I, of course, compensated for with a restless but, to be frank, ambitionless intelligence. I was sick a lot. And throughout every illness she'd watch over my body with an almost sinful attention, with a concern tainted by a vague undercurrent of incest. She'd reproach me for getting the smallest scratch, as if I had wounded Musa himself.

And so I was deprived of the healthy joys of youth, the awakening of the senses, the clandestine eroticism of adolescence. I grew silent and ashamed. I avoided hammams and playing with others, and in the winter I wore djellabahs that hid me from people's eyes. It took me years to become reconciled with my body, with myself. In fact, to this day I don't know if I have. I've always had a stiffness in my bearing, owing to my guilt at being alive. Like a true night watchman's son, I sleep very little, and badly—I panic at

the idea of closing my eyes and falling I don't know where without my name to anchor me. Mama gave me her fears, and Musa his corpse. What could a teen-ager do, trapped like that between death and his mother?

I remember the rare days when I accompanied my mother as she walked the streets of Algiers in search of information about my vanished brother. She would set a brisk pace and I'd follow, my eyes fixed on her haik so as not to lose her. And thus an amusing intimacy was created, the source of a brief period of tenderness between us. With her widow's language and her calculated whimpering, Mama collected clues and mixed genuine information with scraps from the previous night's dream. I can still see her with one of Musa's friends, clinging fearfully to his arm as we passed through French neighborhoods, where we were considered intruders.

Yes, we made an odd couple, roaming the streets of the capital like that! Much later, after the story of Musa's death had become a famous book and departed the country, leaving my mother and me in oblivion—even though we were the ones who had suffered the loss of the book's sacrificial victim—I often went back in memory to the Belcourt neighborhood and our investigations, remembering how we'd scrutinize windows and building façades, looking for

clues. One day, Mama finally got a fragile lead she could follow: someone had given her an address. Now Algiers seemed a frightening labyrinth whenever we ventured outside our perimeter, but Mama walked without stopping, passing a cemetery and a covered market and some cafés, through a jungle of stares and cries and car horns, until she finally stopped short and gazed at a house across the street from us. It was a fine day, and I was lagging behind her, panting, because she'd been walking very fast. All along the way, I'd heard her muttering insults and threats, praying to God and her ancestors, or maybe to the ancestors of God himself, who knows. I resented her excitement a little, without knowing exactly why. It was a two-story house, and the windows were closed—nothing else to report. The roumis in the street were eying us with great distrust.

We remained there in silence for a long time. An hour, maybe two, and then Mama, without so much as a glance at me, crossed the street and knocked resolutely on the door. An old Frenchwoman opened it. The light behind Mama made it hard for the lady to see her, but she put her hand over her brow like a visor and examined her visitor carefully, and I watched uneasiness, incomprehension, and finally terror come over her face. She turned red, fear rose in her eyes, and she seemed about to scream. Then I realized



that Mama was reeling off the longest string of curses she'd ever uttered. Agitated, the lady at the door tried to push Mama away. I was afraid for Mama; I was afraid for us. All of a sudden, the Frenchwoman collapsed unconscious on her doorstep. People had stopped to watch. I could make out their shadows behind me—little groups had formed here and there—and then someone shouted the word "Police!" A woman cried out in Arabic, telling Mama to hurry, to get away fast. That was when Mama turned around and shouted, as if she were addressing all the *roumis* in the world, "The sea will swallow you all!" Then she grabbed me, and we took off running, like a pair of maniacs. Once we had got back home, she barricaded herself behind a wall of silence. We went to bed without supper. Later, she would explain to the neighbors that she had found the house where the murderer grew up and had insulted his grandmother, maybe, and then she'd add, "Or one of his relatives, or at least a roumia like him."

The murderer had lived somewhere in a neighborhood not far from the sea. There was a building with a vaguely sagging upper story above a café, poorly protected by a few trees, but its windows were always closed in those days, so I think Mama had insulted an anonymous old Frenchwoman with no connection

to our tragedy. Long after Independence, a new tenant opened the shutters and eliminated the last possibility of a mystery. This is all to tell you that no one we met was ever able to say that he'd crossed the murderer's path or looked into his eyes or understood his motives. Mama questioned a great many people, so many that I eventually felt ashamed for her, as if she were begging for money and not clues. Her investigations served as a ritual to lessen her pain, and her comings and goings in the French part of the city turned, however incongruously, into opportunities for extended walks.

I recall the day when we finally arrived at the sea. The sky was gray, and a few metres away from me was our family's huge and mighty adversary, the thief of Arabs, the killer of young men in overalls. It was indeed the last witness on Mama's list. As soon as we got there, she pronounced Sidi Abderrahman's name and then, several times, the name of God, ordered me to stay away from the water, sat down, and massaged her aching ankles. I stood behind her, a child facing the immensity of both the crime and the horizon. What did I feel? Nothing except the wind on my skin—it was autumn, the autumn after the murder. I tasted the salt. I saw the dense gray waves. That's all. The sea was like a wall with soft, moving edges. Far off, up in the sky, there were some heavy white clouds. I started picking up things that were lying on the sand: seashells, glass shards, bottle caps, clumps of dark seaweed. The sea told us nothing, and Mama remained motionless on the shore, like someone bending over a grave. Finally, she stood up straight, looked attentively right and left, and said, in a hoarse voice, "God's curse be upon you!" Then she took me by the hand and led me away from the sand, as she'd done so often before. I followed her.

One more memory: the visits to the hereafter, on Fridays, at the summit of Bab-el-Oued. I'm talking about the El-Kettar Cemetery, otherwise known as "the Perfumery," because of the former jasmine distillery situated nearby. Every other Friday, we'd go to the cemetery to visit Musa's empty grave. Mama would whimper, which I found uncalled for and ridiculous, because there was nothing in that hole. I remember the mint that grew in the cemetery, the trees, the winding aisles, Mama's white haik against the too blue sky. Everybody in the neighborhood knew that the hole was empty, knew that Mama filled it with her prayers and her inventions. That cemetery was the place where I awakened to life. It was where I became aware that I had a right to the fire of my presence in the worldyes, I had a right to it!—despite the absurdity of my condition, which consisted of pushing a corpse to the top of a hill before it rolled back down, endlessly. Those days, the cemetery days, were the first days when I turned to pray not toward Mecca but toward the world. Nowadays, I'm working on better versions of those prayers. But back then I had discovered, in some obscure way, a form of sensuality. How can I explain it to you? The angle of the light, the vigorous blue of the sky, and the wind woke in me something more disturbing than the simple satisfaction you feel after a need has been met. Remember, I wasn't quite ten years old, and therefore still clinging to my mother's breast. That cemetery had the attraction of a playground for me. My mother never guessed that it was there that I definitively buried Musa one day, mutely shouting at him to leave me alone. Precisely there, in El-Kettar, an Arab cemetery. Today, it's a dirty place, inhabited by fugitives and drunks. I'm told that marble is stolen from the tombs each and every night. You want to go and see it?



"In this company, Simmons, we hold our hands steady in the middle and shake our bodies."

It'll be a waste of time—you won't find anyone there, and you especially won't find a trace of that grave, which was dug like the prophet Yusuf's well. If the body's not in it, you can't prove anything. Mama wasn't entitled to anything. Not to apologies before Independence, not to a pension afterward.

fter Musa died, my mother turned After tyrusa area, ...,
fierce, in a way. Try to imagine the woman: snatched away from her tribe, given in marriage to a husband who didn't know her and who hastened to get away from her, the mother of two sons, one dead and one a child too silent to give her the proper cues, a woman who lost two men and was forced to work for roumis in order to survive. She developed a taste for her martyrdom. Did I love her? Of course. For us, a mother is half the world. But I've never forgiven her for the way she treated me. She resented me for a death she felt I had somehow refused to undergo, and so she punished me. I don't know-I had a lot of resistance in me, and she could sense that, in a confused sort of way.

Mama knew the art of making ghosts live and, conversely, was very good at annihilating those close to her, drowning them in the monstrous torrents of her made-up tales. She can't read, but I promise you, my friend, she would have told you the story of our family and my brother better than I can. She lied not out of a desire to deceive but in order to correct reality and to mitigate the absurdity that had struck her world and mine. Musa's passing destroyed her, but, paradoxically, it also introduced her to the morbid pleasure of a never-ending mourning. For a long time, not a year passed without my mother swearing that she'd found Musa's body, heard his breathing or his footsteps, recognized the imprint of his shoes. And, for a long time, this made me feel impossibly ashamed of her—and, later, it pushed me to learn a language that could serve as a barrier between her frenzies and me. Yes, the language. The one I read, the one I speak today, the one that's not hers. Hers is rich, full of imagery, vitality, sudden jolts, and improvisations, but not too big on precision. Mama's grief lasted so long that she needed a new idiom in which to express it. In her language, she spoke like a prophetess, recruited extemporane-



"The Ugly Duckling didn't know why he was so attracted to swan culture."

ous mourners, and cried out against the double outrage that had consumed her life: a husband swallowed up by air, a son by water. I had to learn a different language. To survive. After my presumed fifteenth birthday, when we withdrew to Hadjout, I became a stern and serious scholar. Books gradually enabled me to name things, to organize the world with my own words.

In Hadjout, I also discovered trees and a sky that I could almost reach. Eventually I was admitted to a school where there were a few other little natives like me. That helped to distract me from Mama and her disturbing way of watching me eat and grow, as if she were fattening me up for a sacrifice. Those were strange years. I felt alive when I was on the street, in school, or at the farms where I worked, but going home meant stepping into a grave or, at least, falling ill. Mama and Musa were both waiting for me, each in a different way, and I was almost obliged to explain myself, to jus-

tify the hours I'd wasted not sharpening the knife of our family's vengeance. In the neighborhood, our shack was considered a sinister place. The other children referred to me as "the widow's son." People were afraid of Mama, but they also suspected her of having committed a crime, a bizarre crime—otherwise, why leave the city to come here and wash dishes for the roumis? We must have presented a peculiar spectacle when we arrived in Hadjout: a mother hiding her carefully folded newspaper clippings in her bosom, a teen-ager with his eyes on his bare feet, and some raggedy baggage. Right around that time, the murderer was climbing the last steps of his fame. It was the nineteen-fifties; the Frenchwomen wore short, flowered dresses, and the sun bit at their breasts. •

(Translated, from the French, by John Cullen.)

NEWYORKER.COM

Kamel Daoud on "Musa."

THE CRITICS



POP MUSIC

FIRST-PERSON SINGULAR

Waxahatchee's unadulterated songs.

BY KELEFA SANNEH

lmost exactly a year ago, Katie A Crutchfield sent a message to her Twitter followers: "wrote a 4 minute long song for the first time in my life." She was twenty-five years old, and although her tweet could have been mistaken for the triumphant cry of a novice songwriter, Crutchfield was not in any sense a beginner. Since she was fourteen, she has released dozens of albums, singles, cassettes, and digital downloads, working alone or with bandmates, a category that has often included her twin sister, Allison. What began as an extracurricular activity has become a career, as more people have discovered the sneaky power of Crutchfield's short songs, which aren't nearly as sketchy as they first seem. A typical composition requires only a couple of minutes, not many more chords, and a fistful of acute lyrics delivered in the first person, present tense. Often, Crutchfield seems to be reliving a decisive moment between indecisive people: I do this, you do that, we do something else. Her voice is achy but unembellished, except for the lungfuls of air that escape along with the words: when you hear her sing, you are also hearing her breathe.

For the past few years, Crutchfield's main concern has been Waxahatchee, a band that is also, more or less, a solo project: she writes all the songs, makes all the consequential decisions, and manages the fluctuating lineup. The first full-length Waxahatchee album, "American Weekend," appeared in 2012, the quiet and unnervingly intense product of a

weeklong burst of solitary writing and recording. The follow-up, "Cerulean Salt," came out the next year. In putting the album on its "Best New Music" list, the music Web site Pitchfork called it "blazingly honest," not because Crutchfield's songs necessarily reflect her life—how could we know for sure?—but because she sings them as if they did, and because she writes the kind of lyrics that can make listeners feel like eavesdroppers. Crutchfield began to accumulate the trappings of indie celebrity—a Twitter endorsement from Lena Dunham ("@k_crutchfield You make me feel like a natural woman"), an appearance at Coachella—alongside some less expected ones. In an episode from Season 4 of "The Walking Dead," Beth Greene, a thoughtful teen-ager, sat down at a piano and began singing to herself, murmuring about youthful excess: "We'll buy beer to shotgun/And we'll lay in the lawn/And we'll be good." One of Crutchfield's most finely wrought songs had been reborn as a plot point in a television show about zombies.

The new Waxahatchee album, "Ivy Tripp," marks another step in Crutchfield's ascendance: it was released by Merge Records, which puts her on the same label—although not in the same league—as Arcade Fire. It opens with "Breathless," the song that Crutchfield described in that exuberant tweet. (It is not actually her first song longer than four minutes, as one of her fans reminded her in response.) "Breathless" lasts for four minutes and forty-six seconds, an-

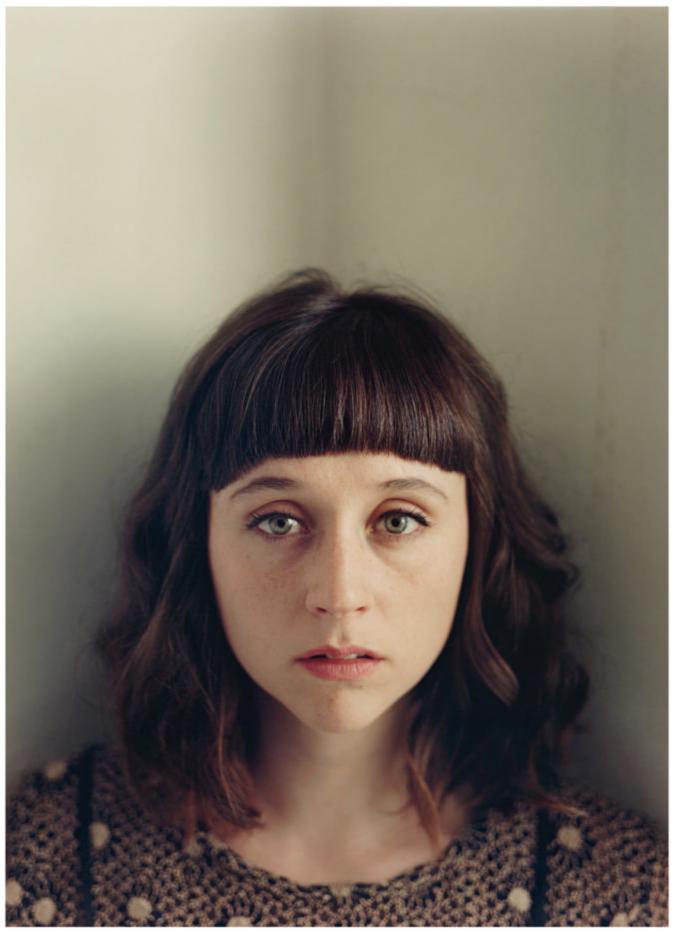
chored by a stately organ line, and enriched by the warm harmony of Crutchfield's voice, overdubbed:

You take what you want, you call me back I'm not trying to be yours You indulge me, I indulge you But I'm not trying to have it all To have it all.

The steadiness of that voice makes her sound fearless, and underscores a subtly defiant sensibility that separates her from any number of quietly confessional singer-songwriters. Like many of her songs, this one seems to be about an uneasy relationship, but it also hints at a broader, more political form of dissatisfaction.

When Crutchfield talks about other musicians, she can still sound like an eager young fan. She once tweeted, "i am constantly going to bat for fiona apple like she's my best friend." Then, less than a minute later: "maybe she IS my best friend." She has tattoos on her arms inspired by two bands that inspired her, Rilo Kiley and Hop Along. When she was fourteen, Crutchfield sounded older than she was, but the passage of time has made it easier to perceive her youthful spirit. Mish Way, the leader of a barbed indie band called White Lung, wrote that "Cerulean Salt" was "the record my sixteen-year-old self would have aspired to write." This appeared to be a backhanded compliment, until the next sentence arrived: "It's the record I would write now if I weren't so afraid." Crutchfield's favorite singers share a willingness to deliver the kind of impassioned, seemingly confessional lyrics that some teen-agers adore and some grownupsunwisely—disdain. Along the way, Crutchfield has become a favorite singer, too, and undoubtedly the object of more than a few imaginary friendships. This year, as she goes on tour to play her new songs, she shouldn't be surprised if she is approached by shy young fans who proffer arms or legs so that Crutchfield can see her own face looking back, drawn in permanent ink.

Crutchfield grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, which had a do-it-yourself music scene centered on an all-ages performance space called Cave9. She was inspired by the punk ethos of that community, even though the forms it took were sometimes off-putting. In an



Katie Crutchfield, of Waxahatchee, is the most celebrated musician in a burgeoning Philadelphia scene.

essay that she later wrote for a fanzine, Crutchfield remembered a scene full of "gym-shorts-wearing, ex-girlfriendcursing, sexist" bands, and imagined warning her younger self not to trust every guy who claimed to like her music. At fifteen, she was the lead singer of the Ackleys, a proficient and precocious alternative-rock band whose brisk, tuneful songs sometimes seemed to be at war with her knotty lyrics. The Ackleys released an album and an EP, and found a place on the 2006 Warped tour. A short documentary on the band captures her sister Allison, who played keyboards, wistfully voicing a hope common to members of high-school bands: "I see it going forever." When it didn't, the Crutchfields formed P.S. Eliot, which was a bit more ramshackle and a lot better, as they discovered all the rock-androll commandments-including the imperative to sound "tight"—that they could happily ignore.

P.S. Eliot played its last show in 2011, and with her next project, Waxahatchee, Katie Crutchfield eliminated nearly everything from her music except herself. The first Waxahatchee release was a cassette collaboration with Chris Clavin, a folk-punk firebrand from Indiana. On one side of the cassette, Clavin warbled a militant ode to John Hinckley, Jr., announcing, not necessarily in jest, that "there ain't nothing wrong with trying to kill the President." On the other side, Crutchfield sang words so forthright, through a microphone so crude, that she could have been talking on the telephone: "You spell it out, how I mistreated you/And I'm silent—you know I treat myself badly, too."

In the nineteen-nineties, when singersongwriters like Robert Pollard, of Guided by Voices, and Liz Phair experimented with homemade recordings, or with songs that ended before the second chorus, they were marking their distance from the musical mainstream. At the time, many indie bands were trying to reckon with the potentially destructive power of the major-label music industry. One way to disengage was to record songs that were accessible, even hummable, without being at all marketable. But time and critical acclaim have combined to create an indie-rock canon—it is no longer a contradiction in terms to talk about classic indie rock. And so gestures that

once seemed irreverent can now seem highly reverent: part of what listeners loved about those early Waxahatchee recordings was the way they evoked a certain strain of emotionally direct indie rock, thereby refreshing it.

Vhen P.S. Eliot first started attracting attention, the Crutchfields'youth seemed less surprising than their geographical location, in a region that has never counted indie rock among its chief exports. The sisters left Alabama in 2011, settling first in Brooklyn-by then well established as the Nashville of indie—and then, the next year, in Philadelphia, because it was cheaper and smaller, with a do-it-yourself scene that resembled a more inclusive version of the one they had left behind in Birmingham. Katie Crutchfield spent much of 2014 living on Long Island, near Ronkonkoma, where most of "Ivy Tripp" was recorded. She is back now in Philadelphia, which has become the musical home that she never really had. Waxahatchee remains essentially a solo project, but it is no longer a solitary one—in Philadelphia, Crutchfield is only the most celebrated member of a cozy musical community, home to a number of startlingly good bands that share her commitment to acute songwriting and unpretentious playing.

Last year, when Waxahatchee came to play a show at the Mercury Lounge, on the Lower East Side, Crutchfield brought along an invigorating Philadelphia pop-punk band called Cayetana, led by the singer and guitarist Augusta Koch, who delivers the lyrics in an addictive yelp. The bands first played together when Crutchfield invited Cayetana to take part in the "Cerulean Salt" record-release concert, and Koch describes her as a kind of mentor. ("To have a female that we really respect that didn't know us have faith in us was really important," she once said.) Another Philadelphia band, Radiator Hospital, is led by Crutchfield's former roommate; both sisters contributed backing vocals to "Torch Song," an upbeat but bittersweet album that Rolling Stone called "superb."

Crutchfield's current roommate is Cleo Tucker, an eighteen-year-old Los Angeles native who plays in a drummerless duo called Girlpool, the most

radical band in this cohort. Girlpool's music can be playful or confrontational, and the lyrics occasionally swing from personal narrative to political protest. ("I don't really care about the clothes I wear/I don't really care to brush my hair/I go to work every day/Just to be slut-shamed one day.") Finally, there is Allison Crutchfield, who has her own band, Swearin', which is faster and fuzzier than Waxahatchee, and scarcely less appealing—it would be odd to love one without at least liking the other. Katie Crutchfield's next project is her sister's solo début, which she has agreed to produce.

Fans who have been following these developments, and who have also noticed the changing emotional temperature of the Waxahatchee albums, might wonder whether the two phenomena are related. Modern listeners have been taught never to conflate a singer with her protagonists, but Crutchfield can make it difficult to obey this injunction. "American Weekend" chronicled addiction and despair, and contained at least one song-"Rose, 1956," about an ailing and aging loved one who is taking "short and urgent" breaths—so fraught that she had to remove it from her set list. And the words on "Cerulean Salt" suggested a bleak and bleary landscape (one verse mentioned "silver spoons over fire"), transformed by the flickering possibility of love. Crutchfield's voice can make anything sound sad, but the new album slowly reveals itself to be haunted by an unlikely spectre: contentment. "I know I feel more than you do," Crutchfield sings, in a tidy song called "La Loose," which is powered by a rudimentary rhythm from a drum machine. "I selfishly want you here to stick to." This is Crutchfield's version of a pop record, though perhaps you would have to know her earlier work to know that. Throughout the album, her voice is the only one you hear, often singing along with herself, as if filling in for her absent twin. But she sounds less lonely than she ever has, no matter how sparse the songs remain. One of the sparsest, "Summer of Love," was recorded outside, with a single microphone, and it is bookended by an unexpected sound: the barking of a dog, which evidently had the good sense to keep quiet—as most audiences do while Crutchfield was singing. •

BOOKS

THE SYSTEM

Two new histories show how the Nazi concentration camps worked.

BY ADAM KIRSCH



ne night in the autumn of 1944, two Frenchwomen—Loulou Le Porz, a doctor, and Violette Lecoq, a nurse-watched as a truck drove in through the main gates of Ravensbrück, the Nazi concentration camp for women. "There was a lorry," Le Porz recalled, "that suddenly arrives and it turns around and reverses towards us. And it lifts up and it tips out a whole pile of corpses.' These were the bodies of Ravensbrück inmates who had died doing slave labor in the many satellite camps, and they were now being returned for cremation. Talking, decades later, to the historian and journalist Sarah Helm, whose new book, "Ravensbrück: Life and Death

in Hitler's Concentration Camp for Women" (Doubleday), recounts the stories of dozens of the camp's inmates, Le Porz says that her reaction was simple disbelief. The sight of a truck full of dead bodies was so outrageous, so out of scale with ordinary experience, that "if we recount that one day, we said to each other, nobody would believe us." The only way to make the scene credible would be to record it: "If one day someone makes a film they must film this scene. This night. This moment."

Le Porz's remark was prophetic. The true extent of Nazi barbarity became known to the world in part through the documentary films made by Allied forces after the liberation of other German camps. There have been many atrocities committed before and since, yet to this day, thanks to those images, the Nazi concentration camp stands as the ultimate symbol of evil. The very names of the camps—Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Auschwitz—have the sound of a malevolent incantation. They have ceased to be ordinary place names—*Buchenwald*, after all, means simply "beech wood"—and become portals to a terrible other dimension.

To write the history of such an institution, as Nikolaus Wachsmann sets out to do in another new book, "KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), might seem impossible, like writing the history of Hell. And, certainly, both his book and Helm's are full of the kind of details that ordinarily appear only in Dantesque visions. Helm devotes a chapter to Ravensbrück's Kinderzimmer, or "children's room," where inmates who came to the camp pregnant were forced to abandon their babies; the newborns were left to die of starvation or be eaten alive by rats. Wachsmann quotes a prisoner at Dachau who saw a transport of men afflicted by dysentery arrive at the camp: "We saw dozens . . . with excrement running out of their trousers. Their hands, too, were full of excrement and they screamed and rubbed their dirty hands across their faces."

These sights, like the truck full of bodies, are not beyond belief-we know that they were true—but they are, in some sense, beyond imagination. It is very hard, maybe impossible, to imagine being one of those men, still less one of those infants. And such sights raise the question of why, exactly, we read about the camps. If it is merely to revel in the grotesque, then learning about this evil is itself a species of evil, a further exploitation of the dead. If it is to exercise sympathy or pay a debt to memory, then it quickly becomes clear that the exercise is hopeless, the debt overwhelming: there is no way to feel as much, remember as much, imagine as much as the dead justly demand. What remains as a justification is the future: the determination never again to allow something like the Nazi camps to exist.

And for that purpose it is necessary

not to think of the camps simply as a hellscape. Reading Wachsmann's deeply researched, groundbreaking history of the entire camp system makes clear that Dachau and Buchenwald were the products of institutional and ideological forces that we can understand, perhaps all too well. Indeed, it's possible to think of the camps as what happens when you cross three disciplinary institutions that all societies possess—the prison, the army, and the factory. Over the several phases of their existence, the Nazi camps took on the aspects of all of these, so that prisoners were treated simultaneously as inmates to be corrected, enemies to be combatted, and workers to be exploited. When these forms of dehumanization were combined, and amplified to the maximum by ideology and war, the result was the Konzentrationlager, or K.L.

Though we tend to think of Hitler's Germany as a highly regimented dictatorship, in practice Nazi rule was chaotic and improvisatory. Rival power bases in the Party and the German state competed to carry out what they believed to be Hitler's wishes. This system of "working towards the Fuhrer," as it was called by Hitler's biographer Ian Kershaw, was clearly in evidence when it came to the concentration camps. The K.L. system, during

its twelve years of existence, included twenty-seven main camps and more than a thousand subcamps. At its peak, in early 1945, it housed more than seven hundred thousand inmates. In addition to being a major penal and economic institution, it was a central symbol of Hitler's rule. Yet Hitler plays almost no role in Wachsmann's book, and Wachsmann writes that Hitler was never seen to visit a camp. It was Heinrich Himmler, the head of the S.S., who was in charge of the camp system, and its growth was due in part to his ambition to make the S.S. the most powerful force in Germany.

Long before the Nazis took power, concentration camps had featured in their imagination. Wachsmann finds Hitler threatening to put Jews in camps as early as 1921. But there were no detailed plans for building such camps when Hitler was named Chancellor of Germany, in January, 1933. A few weeks later, on February 27th, he seized on the burning of the Reichstag-by Communists, he alleged—to launch a full-scale crackdown on his political opponents. The next day, he implemented a decree, "For the Protection of People and State," that authorized the government to place just about anyone in "protective custody," a euphemism for indefinite detention. (Euphemism, too, was to be a durable feature of the K.L. universe: the killing of prisoners was referred to as *Sonderbehandlung*, "special treatment.")

During the next two months, some fifty thousand people were arrested on this basis, in what turned into a "frenzy" of political purges and score-settling. In the legal murk of the early Nazi regime, it was unclear who had the power to make such arrests, and so it was claimed by everyone: national, state, and local officials, police and civilians, Party leaders. "Everybody is arresting everybody," a Nazi official complained in the summer of 1933. "Everybody threatens everybody with Dachau." As this suggests, it was already clear that the most notorious and frightening destination for political detainees was the concentration camp built by Himmler at Dachau, in Bavaria. The prisoners were originally housed in an old munitions factory, but soon Himmler constructed a "model camp," the architecture and organization of which provided the pattern for most of the later K.L. The camp was guarded not by police but by members of the S.S.—a Nazi Party entity rather than a state force.

These guards were the core of what became, a few years later, the much feared Death's-Head S.S. The name, along with the skull-and-crossbones insignia, was meant to reinforce the idea that the men who bore it were not mere prison guards but front-line soldiers in the Nazi war against enemies of the people. Himmler declared, "No other service is more devastating and strenuous for the troops than just that of guarding villains and criminals."The ideology of combat had been part of the DNA of Nazism from its origin, as a movement of First World War veterans, through the years of street battles against Communists, which established the Party's reputation for violence. Now, in the years before actual war came, the K.L. was imagined as the site of virtual combat-against Communists, criminals, dissidents, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Jews, all forces working to undermine the German nation.

The metaphor of war encouraged the inhumanity of the S.S. officers, which they called toughness; licensed physical violence against prisoners; and accounted for the military discipline that made everyday life in the K.L. unbearable. Particularly hated was the roll call, or



"And, as you drive, it will also use all the negative energy from your arguments."

Appell, which forced inmates to wake before dawn and stand outside, in all weather, to be counted and recounted. The process could go on for hours, Wachsmann writes, during which the S.S. guards were constantly on the move, punishing "infractions such as poor posture and dirty shoes."

The K.L. was defined from the beginning by its legal ambiguity. The camps were outside ordinary law, answerable not to judges and courts but to the S.S. and Himmler. At the same time, they were governed by an extensive set of regulations, which covered everything from their layout (including decorative flower beds) to the whipping of prisoners, which in theory had to be approved on a case-by-case basis by Himmler personally. Yet these regulations were often ignored by the camp S.S.—physical violence, for instance, was endemic, and the idea that a guard would have to ask permission before beating or even killing a prisoner was laughable. Strangely, however, it was possible, in the prewar years, at least, for a guard to be prosecuted for such a killing. In 1937, Paul Zeidler was among a group of guards who strangled a prisoner who had been a prominent churchman and judge; when the case attracted publicity, the S.S. allowed Zeidler to be charged and convicted. (He was sentenced to a year in jail.)

In "Ravensbrück," Helm gives a further example of the erratic way the Nazis treated their own regulations, even late in the war. In 1943, Himmler agreed to allow the Red Cross to deliver food parcels to some prisoners in the camps. To send a parcel, however, the Red Cross had to mark it with the name, number, and camp location of the recipient; requests for these details were always refused, so that there was no way to get desperately needed supplies into the camps. Yet when Wanda Hjort, a young Norwegian woman living in Germany, got hold of some prisoners' names and numbers—thanks to inmates who smuggled the information to her when she visited the camp at Sachsenhausen she was able to pass them on to the Norwegian Red Cross, whose packages were duly delivered. This game of hideand-seek with the rules, this combination of hyper-regimentation and anarchy, is what makes Kafka's "The Trial" seem to foretell the Nazi regime.

Even the distinction between guard and prisoner could become blurred. From early on, the S.S. delegated much of the day-to-day control of camp life to chosen prisoners known as Kapos. This system spared the S.S. the need to interact too closely with prisoners, whom they regarded as bearers of filth and disease, and also helped to divide the in-

mate population against itself. Helm shows that, in Ravensbrück, where the term "Blockova" was used, rather than Kapo, power struggles took place among prisoner factions over who would occupy the Blockova position in each barrack. Political prisoners fa-

vored fellow-activists over criminals and "asocials"—a category that included the homeless, the mentally ill, and prostitutes-whom they regarded as practically subhuman. In some cases, Kapos became almost as privileged, as violent, and as hated as the S.S. officers. In Ravensbrück, the most feared Blockova was the Swiss ex-spy Carmen Mory, who was known as the Black Angel. She was in charge of the infirmary, where, Helm writes, she "would lash out at the sick with the whip or her fists." After the war, she was one of the defendants tried for crimes at Ravensbrück, along with S.S. leaders and doctors. Mory was sentenced to death but managed to commit suicide first.

t the bottom of the K.L. hierarchy, At the bottom of the K.L. meratery, even below the criminals, were the Jews. Today, the words "concentration camp"immediately summon up the idea of the Holocaust, the genocide of European Jews by the Nazis; and we tend to think of the camps as the primary sites of that genocide. In fact, as Wachsmann writes, as late as 1942 "Jews made up fewer than five thousand of the eighty thousand KL inmates."There had been a temporary spike in the Jewish inmate population in November, 1938, after Kristallnacht, when the Nazis rounded up tens of thousands of Jewish men. But, for most of the camps' first decade, Jewish prisoners had usually been sent there not for their religion, per se, but for specific offenses, such as political dissent or illicit sexual relations with an Aryan. Once there, however, they found themselves subject to special torments, ranging from running a gantlet of truncheons to heavy labor, like rock-breaking. As the chief enemies in the Nazi imagination, Jews were also the natural targets for spontaneous S.S. violence—blows, kicks, attacks by savage dogs.

The systematic extermination of

Jews, however, took place largely outside the concentration camps. The death camps, in which more than one and a half million Jews were gassed—at Belzec, Sobibór, and Treblinka—were never officially part of the K.L. system. They had almost no inmates,

since the Jews sent there seldom lived longer than a few hours. By contrast, Auschwitz, whose name has become practically a synonym for the Holocaust, was an official K.L., set up in June, 1940, to house Polish prisoners. The first people to be gassed there, in September, 1941, were invalids and Soviet prisoners of war. It became the central site for the deportation and murder of European Jews in 1943, after other camps closed. The vast majority of Jews brought to Auschwitz never experienced the camp as prisoners; more than eight hundred thousand of them were gassed upon arrival, in the vast extension of the original camp known as Birkenau. Only those picked as capable of slave labor lived long enough to see Auschwitz from the inside.

Many of the horrors associated with Auschwitz—gas chambers, medical experiments, working prisoners to deathhad been pioneered in earlier concentration camps. In the late thirties, driven largely by Himmler's ambition to make the S.S. an independent economic and military power within the state, the K.L. began a transformation from a site of punishment to a site of production. The two missions were connected: the "workshy" and other unproductive elements were seen as "useless mouths," and forced labor was a way of making them contribute to the community. Oswald Pohl, the S.S. bureaucrat in charge of economic affairs, had gained control of the camps by 1938, and began a series of grandiose building projects. The most ambitious was the construction of a brick factory near Sachsenhausen, which was intended to produce a hundred and fifty million bricks a year, using cutting-edge equipment and camp labor.

The failure of the factory, as Wachsmann describes it, was indicative of the incompetence of the S.S. and the inconsistency of its vision for the camps. To turn prisoners into effective laborers would have required giving them adequate food and rest, not to mention training and equipment. It would have meant treating them like employees rather than like enemies. But the ideological momentum of the camps made this inconceivable. Labor was seen as a punishment and a weapon, which meant that it had to be extorted under the worst possible circumstances. Prisoners were made to build the factory in the depths of winter, with no coats or gloves, and no tools. "Inmates carried piles of sand in their uniforms," Wachsmann writes, while others "moved large mounds of earth on rickety wooden stretchers or shifted sacks of cement on their shoulders." Four hundred and twenty-nine prisoners died and countless more were injured, yet in the end not a single brick was produced.

This debacle did not discourage Himmler and Pohl. On the contrary, with the coming of war, in 1939, S.S. ambitions for the camps grew rapidly, along with their prisoner population. On the eve of the war, the entire K.L. system contained only about twenty-one thousand prisoners; three years later, the number had grown to a hundred and ten thousand, and by January, 1945, it was more than seven hundred thousand. New camps were built to accommodate the influx of prisoners from conquered countries and then the tens of thousands of Red Army soldiers taken prisoner in the first months after Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the U.S.S.R.

The enormous expansion of the camps resulted in an exponential increase in the misery of the prisoners. Food rations, always meagre, were cut to less than minimal: a bowl of rutabaga soup and some ersatz bread would have to sustain a prisoner doing heavy labor. The result was desperate black marketing and theft. Wachsmann writes, "In

Sachsenhausen, a young French prisoner was battered to death in 1941 by an SS block leader for taking two carrots from a sheep pen." Starvation was endemic and rendered prisoners easy prey for typhus and dysentery. At the same time, the need to keep control of so many prisoners made the S.S. even more brutal, and sadistic new punishments were invented. The "standing commando" forced prisoners to stand absolutely still for eight hours at a time; any movement or noise was punished by beatings. The murder of prisoners by guards, formerly an exceptional event in the camps, now became unremarkable.

But individual deaths, by sickness or violence, were not enough to keep the number of prisoners within manageable limits. Accordingly, in early 1941 Himmler decided to begin the mass murder of prisoners in gas chambers, building on a program that the Nazis had developed earlier for euthanizing the disabled. Here, again, the camps sinister combination of bureaucratic rationalism and anarchic violence was on display. During the following months, teams of S.S. doctors visited the major camps in turn, inspecting prisoners in order to select the "infirm" for gassing. Everything was done with an appearance of medical rigor. The doctors filled out a form for each inmate, with headings for "Diagnosis" and "Incurable Physical Ailments." But it was all mere theatre. Helm's description of the visit of Dr. Friedrich Mennecke to Ravensbrück, in November, 1941, shows that inspections of prisoners—whom he referred to in letters home as "forms" or "portions"—were cursory at best, with the victims parading naked in front of the doctors at a distance of twenty feet. (Jewish prisoners were automatically "selected," without an examination.) In one letter, Mennecke brags of having disposed of fifty-six "forms" before noon. Those selected were taken to an undisclosed location for gassing; their fate became clear to the remaining Ravensbrück prisoners when the dead women's clothes and personal effects arrived back at the camp by truck.

Under this extermination program, known to S.S. bureaucrats by the code Action 14f13, some sixty-five hundred prisoners were killed in the course of a year. By early 1942, it had become

obsolete, as the scale of death in the camps increased. Now the killing of weak and sick prisoners was carried out by guards or camp doctors, sometimes in gas chambers built on site. Those who were still able to work were increasingly auctioned off to private industry for use as slave labor, in the many subcamps that began to spring up around the main K.L. At Ravensbrück, the Siemens corporation established a factory where six hundred women worked twelve-hour shifts building electrical components. The work was brutally demanding, especially for women who were sick, starved, and exhausted. Helm writes that "Siemens women suffered severely from boils, swollen legs, diarrhea and TB," and also from an epidemic of nervous twitching. When a worker reached the end of her usefulness, she was sent back to the camp, most likely to be killed. It was in this phase of the camp's life that sights like the one Loulou Le Porz saw at Ravensbrück-a truck full of prisoners' corpses—became commonplace.

By the end of the war, the number of people who had died in the concentration camps, from all causes—starvation, sickness, exhaustion, beating, shooting, gassing—was more than eight hundred thousand. The figure does not include the hundreds of thousands of Jews gassed on arrival at Auschwitz. If the K.L. were indeed a battlefront, as the Death's-Head S.S. liked to believe, the deaths, in the course of twelve years, roughly equalled the casualties sustained by the Axis during the Battle of Stalingrad, among the deadliest actual engagements of the war. But in the camps the Nazis fought against helpless enemies. Considered as prisons, too, the K.L. were paradoxical: it was impossible to correct or rehabilitate people whose very nature, according to Nazi propaganda, was criminal or sick. And as economic institutions they were utterly counterproductive, wasting huge numbers of lives even as the need for workers in Germany became more and more acute.

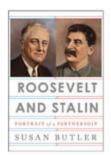
The concentration camps make sense only if they are understood as products not of reason but of ideology, which is to say, of fantasy. Nazism taught the Germans to see themselves

as a beleaguered nation, constantly set upon by enemies external and internal. Metaphors of infection and disease, of betrayal and stabs in the back, were central to Nazi discourse. The concentration camp became the place where those metaphorical evils could be rendered concrete and visible. Here, behind barbed wire, were the traitors, Bolsheviks, parasites, and Jews who were intent on destroying the Fatherland.

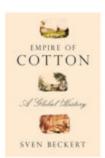
And if existence was a struggle, a war, then it made no sense to show mercy to the enemy. Like many Nazi institutions, the K.L. embodied conflicting impulses: to reform the criminal, to extort labor from the unproductive, to quarantine the contagious. But most fundamental was the impulse to dehumanize the enemy, which ended up confounding and overriding all the others. Once a prisoner ceased to be human, he could be brutalized, enslaved, experimented on, or gassed at will, because he was no longer a being with a soul or a self but a biological machine. The Muselmänner, the living dead of the camps, stripped of any capacity to think or feel, were the true product of the K.L., the ultimate expression of the Nazi world view.

The impulse to separate some groups of people from the category of the human is, however, a universal one. The enemies we kill in war, the convicted prisoners we lock up for life, even the distant workers who manufacture our clothes and toys-how could any society function if the full humanity of all these were taken into account? In a decent society, there are laws to resist such dehumanization, and institutional and moral forces to protest it. When guards at Rikers Island beat a prisoner to death, or when workers in China making iPhones begin to commit suicide out of despair, we regard these as intolerable evils that must be cured. It is when a society decides that some people deserve to be treated this waythat it is not just inevitable but right to deprive whole categories of people of their humanity—that a crime on the scale of the K.L. becomes a possibility. It is a crime that has been repeated too many times, in too many places, for us to dismiss it with the simple promise of never again.

BRIEFLY NOTED



ROOSEVELT AND STALIN, by Susan Butler (Knopf). This painstaking examination of Roosevelt and Stalin's complicated relationship centers on two face-to-face meetings—in Tehran in 1943 and in Yalta in 1945—as they argued over wartime strategy and postwar planning. Butler relays entertaining details (when Stalin doodled, he drew Siberian wolves), and emphasizes Roosevelt's unwavering resolve to keep Stalin "inside the tent," in order to establish the United Nations. Particularly compelling is her account of F.D.R.'s death. Averell Harriman, the Ambassador to the Soviet Union, said that although Stalin "was never known for any display of emotion," he was "deeply shaken and more disturbed than I had ever seen him." Mourning flags were displayed at all government agencies in Moscow.



EMPIRE OF COTTON, by Sven Beckert (Knopf). Cotton production provides a lens through which to view the history of capitalism in this exhaustively researched book. The crop emerged more than five thousand years ago, in the Indus Valley, and medieval Europeans knew of it only from travellers' accounts (it was sometimes called "vegetable lamb"). The rise of colonialism, followed by the Industrial Revolution, made it "the first globally integrated manufacturing industry." Now cotton is everywhere—in banknotes, coffee filters, and even gunpowder. Beckert cogently charts this transformation and connects seemingly disparate events to his theme. He argues persuasively that cotton's profitability explains Britain's takeover of Egypt, Walmart's success, the endless worldwide search for cheaper labor.



MUNICH AIRPORT, by Greg Baxter (Twelve). The airport is a symbol of dislocation in this novel about an unnamed American living in London. A weary, divorced, mid-level marketing professional, he exists in reduced circumstances (small flat, free-lance consultancy gigs). When he hears that his sister has been found dead in her apartment in Germany, he and his father set out to fly the body to America for burial. (As the novel opens, he is waiting in a departure lounge.) Grief and connection with the people who knew his sister remain closed to him. The book uses the essence of modern air travel—the slow passage through colorless places of delay, helplessness, and frustration—to evoke an enigmatic sense of emptiness.



WEST OF SUNSET, by Stewart O'Nan (Viking). This novel of F. Scott Fitzgerald's last years tracks him as he hacks away at Hollywood screenplays, perpetually menaced by poor health, poor finances, and a sense of his rusting legacy. Drowning in memories of a world "all promise and sweet fumbling," Scott struggles not to disappoint his teen-age daughter, falls for a mysterious gossip columnist, and visits the institutionalized, tragically unstable Zelda. The narration wanders between wistful elegy and snappy one-liners delivered by, among others, Ernest Hemingway, Humphrey Bogart, and Shirley Temple. O'Nan's adroitness with atmosphere and period detail makes Fitzgerald's dreams of creating worthy work, even with his best days behind him, absorbing and poignant.

BOOKS

DEAR DIARY, I HATE YOU

Reflections on journals in an age of overshare.

BY ALICE GREGORY



Sarah Manguso

suspect that many people who don't L keep a diary worry that they ought to, and that, for some, the failure to do so is a source of fathomless self-loathing. What could be more worth remembering than one's own life? Is there a good excuse for forgetting even a single day? Something like this anxiety seems to have prompted the poet and essayist Sarah Manguso, on the cusp of adulthood, to begin writing a journal, which she has kept ever since. "I wrote so I could say I was truly paying attention," she tells us early in her memoir "Ongoingness" (Graywolf). "Experience in itself wasn't enough. The diary was my defense against waking up at the end of my life and realizing I'd missed it."

The journal, first envisioned as an

amulet against the passage of time, has grown to overwhelming proportions. "I started keeping a diary twenty-five years ago," Manguso writes. "It's eight hundred thousand words long." And the memoir, a kind of meta-diary, is her attempt to interrogate her obsessive drive to maintain a record of her existence. Careful to preëmpt criticism that her project is fey or vainglorious, she characterizes her diary habit as "a vice," and points out that it has taken the place of "exercise, performing remunerative work, or volunteering my time to the unlucky." Of all the psychological conditions to be burdened with, graphomania is hardly the worst, and Manguso doesn't quite succeed in dispelling the suspicion that she is a little proud of her eccentricities, perhaps even exaggerating them. But she seems genuinely not proud of the diary. "There's no reason to continue writing other than that I started writing at some point—and that, at some other point, I'll stop," she writes. Looking back at entries fills her with embarrassment and occasionally even indifference. She reports that, after finding that she'd recorded "nothing of consequence" in 1996, she "threw the year away."

In her memoir, Manguso makes the striking decision never to quote the diary itself. As she started to look through the old journals, she writes, she became convinced that it was impossible to pull the "best bits" from their context without distorting the sense of the whole: "I decided that the only way to represent the diary in this book would be either to include the entire thing untouched—which would have required an additional eight thousand pages—or to include none of it." The diary, she observes, is the memoir's "dark matter," everywhere but invisible, and the book revolves around a center that is absent. "I envisioned a book without a single quote, a book about pure states of being," she writes. "It sounded almost religious when I put it that way."

Manguso, whose previous books include two other memoirs and two books of poetry, grew up outside Boston. Now in her early forties, she teaches writing in Los Angeles, at Otis College of Art and Design. But for most of the book we come away with only the sketchiest outline of Manguso's life. She's married, with a son. Her son is young; her husband is from Hawaii; she was once very ill. (Her illness was the subject of her remarkable first memoir, "The Two Kinds of Decay.") The individual memories she chooses to share often don't link up to produce a continuous narrative. We get Manguso, at fourteen, looking through a telescope for a comet, failing to see it, and not caring; Manguso, in 1992, writing mostly about hating her mother; Manguso, in college, discovering that a boyfriend has read her diary, including some dismaying reflections on his sexual performance; Manguso, in her late thirties, drinking raspberry-leaf tea in an attempt to trigger early labor, hoping that her husband can be present for both the birth of his son and, an ocean away, the death of his mother.

The memoir, rather than being a synopsis of the life recorded by the diary, is mostly a set of meditations on the fact of the diary's existence. The tone is matter-of-fact, and the controlled, even staid sentences seem deliberately to reject the manic, melodramatic quality of a diary. The book proceeds in sparse, aphoristic fragments, almost like prose poems. None are longer than a page, and some are just a single sentence:

I started keeping the diary in earnest when I started finding myself in moments that were too full.

At an art opening in the late eighties, I held a plastic cup of wine and stood in front of a painting next to a friend I loved. It was all too much.

I stayed partly contained in the moment until that night, when I wrote down everything that had happened and everything I remembered thinking while it happened and everything I thought while recording what I remembered had happened...

There should be extra days, buffer days, between the real days.

Manguso seldom divulges any particularly sensitive information, and yet her material is, in a sense, vastly more intimate than what we usually think of as private. She picks at the places where language butts up against the inexpressible. Her currency is the "henid," the philosopher Otto Weininger's term for the half-formed thought. Her impressions, while lucid, are true to the gauziness of mental life as we experience it. "Ongoingness" is an attempt to take, as Virginia Woolf wrote, "a token of some real thing behind ap-

pearances" and "make it real by putting it into words." It's hard to think of a more perilous way to write.

The great feat of the book is that it L succeeds in not feeling abstract, even though it frequently eschews specificity. There is, in fact, a narrative here, albeit one that functions without the normal signposts of life-writing. Instead, it is a narrative about the gradual shift, as Manguso gets older, in her relationship to time. It is telling that motherhood receives the most attention. "Then I became a mother," she writes. "I began to inhabit time differently." She knows that this is something all parents discover—"this has all been said before"-but the consequences are nonetheless immense. "Nursing an infant creates so much lost, empty time," she writes. "The mother becomes the background against which the baby lives, becomes time."The rapid growth of a young child creates a new kind of time scale: she dreams of her son's teeth "beating time in months, in years, his full jaws a pink-and-white timepiece."

As Manguso's sense of time dissolves, so does her devotion to the diary. In her twenties, she wrote down her experiences constantly and in minute detail. In her thirties, the diary became more of a log: "The rhapsodies of the previous decade thinned out." As she entered her forties, "reflection disappeared almost completely." Manguso doesn't say that she intends to stop keeping her diary, but the subtitle of the memoir—"The End of a Diary"—implies that the habit may have outlived its use-

fulness. Another meaning lurks, too: Why does one keep a diary at all? As she looks back on the colossal project, she feels its futility. Although her method was to write down everything, her abiding sense is that "I failed to record so much." Rather than a protection against time, the diary becomes a cruelly accurate gauge of time's passage. She finds that she is afraid to read it and to face "the artifact of the person I was in 1992 and 1997 and 2003 and so on."

One could argue that reading memoirs comes more naturally to us now than ever before. Our critical faculties and emotional voyeurism are primed as they've never been. Social media barrage us daily with fragmented first-person accounts of people's lives. We have become finely tuned instruments of semiotic analysis, capable of decoding at a glance the false enthusiasm of friends, the connotations of geotags, the tangle of opinions that lie embedded in a single turn of phrase. Continuously providing updates on life for others can encourage a person to hone a sense of humor and check a sense of privilege. It can keep friendships alive that might otherwise fall victim to entropy. But what constantly self-reporting your own life does not seem to enable a person to do—at least, not yet—is to communicate to others a private sense of what it feels like to be you. With "Ongoingness," Manguso has achieved this. In her almost psychedelic musings on time and what it means to preserve one's own life, she has managed to transcribe an entirely interior world. She has written the memoir we didn't realize we needed. •

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VOLUME XCI, NO. 7, April 6, 2015. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 23 & March 2, June 8 & 15, July 6 & 13, August 10 & 17, and December 21 & 28) by Condé Nast, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: Condé Nast, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. Elizabeth Hughes, publisher, chief revenue officer; Beth Lusko, associate publisher advertising; James Guilfoyle, director of finance and business operations; Fabio Bertoni, general counsel. Condé Nast: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, chief executive officer; Robert A. Sauerberg, Jr., president; David E. Geithner, chief financial officer; Jill Bright, chief administrative officer. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001.

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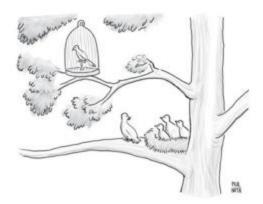
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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Kaamran Hafeez, must be received by Sunday, April 5th. The finalists in the March 23rd contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the April 20th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

"Be careful—the bald spot is slippery." Lev Borisov, Princeton, N.J.



THE FINALISTS

"Is it weird that we have a pet?" Flannery Mack, Salt Lake City, Utah

"Never, ever put me in assisted living." David Wilkner, Pawtucket, R.I.

"He was deemed a flight risk."
Julia Bindler, Mamaroneck, N.Y.



THE STORY CONTINUES



Springtime that the street of the street of

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